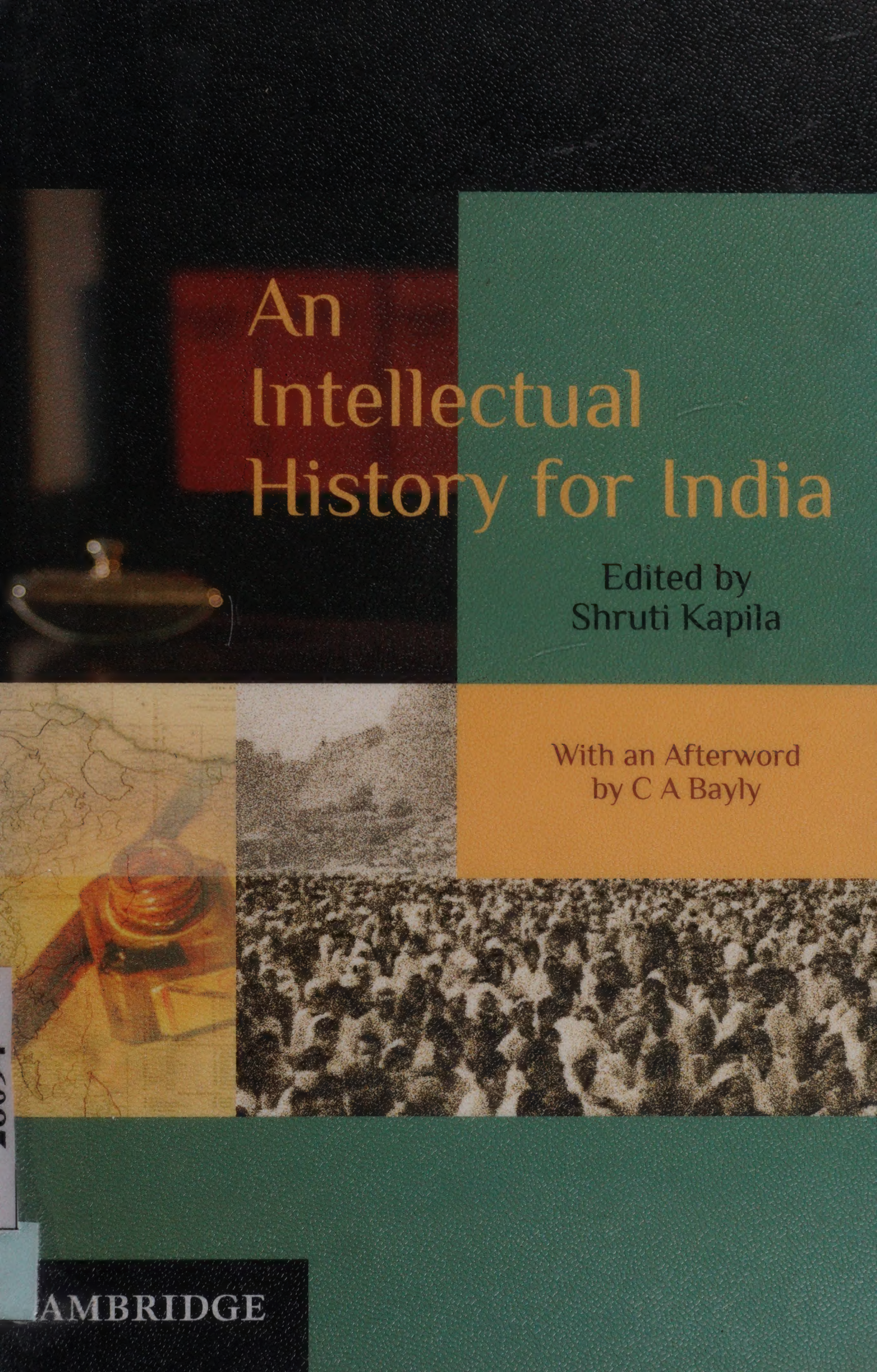




An Intellectual History for India

Edited by
Shruti Kapila

With an Afterword
by C A Bayly

CAMBRIDGE

This volume addresses the power of ideas in the making of Indian political modernity. As an intermediate history of connections between South Asia and the global arena the volume raises new issues in intellectual history. It reviews the period from the emergence of constitutional liberalism in the 1830s, through the swadeshi era to the writings of Tilak, Azad and Gandhi in the twentieth century.

An Intellectual History for India



B. G. Tilak



Syed Ahmed Khan



Aurobindo Ghose

Edited by
Shruti Kapila

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C.A. Bayly



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CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements	v
SHRUTI KAPILA	
Articles	
Anxieties of Distance: Codification in Early Colonial Bengal	1
JON E. WILSON	
Rammohan Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800–30	18
C. A. BAYLY	
Contesting Translations: Orientalism and the Interpretation of the <i>Vedas</i>	35
MICHAEL S. DODSON	
Apologetic Modernity	52
FAISAL DEVJI	
Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Discourse: “Germanism” in Colonial Bengal	68
ANDREW SARTORI	
Striking a Just Balance: Maulana Azad as a Theorist of Transnational Jihad	85
AYESHA JALAL	
Self, Spencer and <i>Swaraj</i> : Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890–1920	98
SHRUTI KAPILA	
The Spirit and Form of an Ethical Polity: A Meditation on Aurobindo’s Thought	117
SUGATA BOSE	
Geographies of Subjectivity, Pan-Islam and Muslim Separatism: Muhammad Iqbal and Selfhood	133
JAVED MAJEED	
Afterword	150
C. A. BAYLY	
List of Contributors	156

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

SHRUTI KAPILA

In a recent appraisal of the nature of the enterprise of intellectual history, it was remarked, not for the first time, that the “the only history of ideas to be written are histories of their uses in argument”.¹ Though perhaps not in such a self-conscious manner, the essays in this issue consider the transformative capacity of ideas. Modern intellectual history in the European and American context grew out of a critique of the dominance of social history; by contrast, it has received little or no attention in the field of colonial and modern South Asia. Despite the vibrancy of the field in general, the two major works in Indian intellectual history were written almost half a century ago. Eric Stokes’s *English Utilitarians and India* and Ranajit Guha’s *A Rule of Property for Bengal* were both concerned with the making of the regime of colonial political economy.² These two important books took the major site of the generation of ideas to be the colonial state and the major actors to be its official intellectuals. Interestingly, both these historians later moved away from intellectual history to social history and the experience of the peasantry. It is an ironic tribute to their books that the subsequent focus of much South Asian historical scholarship has been on the nature of the colonial state and its relation to politics, economy and society. However, the emphasis on the power and the work of ideas, in Stokes’s and Guha’s initial formulations, slowly but surely gave way to “ethnographies of the state”. A related historiographical move emphasized the politics and culture of resistance, as indeed did Stokes and Guha in their later work.

The essays in this collection arose initially out of a concern internal to the historiography of modern South Asia, namely the need to move on from the entrenched positions of the so-called “Chicago” and “Cambridge” schools. For more than a decade, the shadow of Edward Said and the almost unrecognizable

** This is a reprint of the special issue of the journal ‘Modern Intellectual History’ (CUP), April 2007 entitled ‘A New Intellectual History for India’. I am grateful to the MIH editors for their permission to republish and for their support.

¹ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 86.

² Exception remains in the case of political theory; see especially Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

ghost of Michel Foucault have haunted the field, and have had the particular effect of centring it on the power of colonial knowledge in the “Chicago” version and on Indian agency in the “Cambridge” version. While such issues of epistemology, governmentality and reflexivity remain highly significant, the debate has increasingly moved towards interpretative closure.³ Meanwhile, political thought, in particular, has remained under-studied and, in so far as it is studied at all, locked in as an adjunct to the political history of the Indian nation state. The essays in this collection all seek, instead, to examine the meaning and the life of ideas in colonial South Asia. At the same time, a diverse set of questions, methods and persuasions have marked the individual contributions.

In this brief preface there are two central but difficult questions that require attention. First, what is it that intellectual history can offer the field of the history of South Asia? One point is that it can critique and circumvent the narratives of the nation and empire that have constrained scholarship and militated against the interrogation of ideas and their purposes within the South Asian context. It can also dispel the strong presentist teleology which has informed the interpretative focus, for example the nexus between early nineteenth-century orientalism and late colonial nationalism that has recently acquired a mantra-like status. Equally, political history has been primarily written in modular terms of a “liberal phase” followed by “religious nationalism” or religious reform and later “mass” nationalism. Such modular approaches have obfuscated much of the Indian intellectual innovation and reflection of the period.⁴ The contributors to the collection have been mindful of the need to relate their arguments to unfolding political events but do not collapse political thought into them in any simple manner. In a critical sense, therefore, these essays are not rehearsing the history of the nation even though most reflect upon themes that have long been the preserve of nationalist histories. Again, religion has been treated as an open set of ideas that was expressed in terms of political theory, rather than as an essence of South Asian culture or as simply a political instrument of late colonialism or Indian nationalism. Finally, the collection locates the political thought of South Asia within a global context, while avoiding the temptation of merely absorbing South Asian history into world history.

³ For a summary of the positions see William Pinch, “Same Difference in India and Europe”, *History and Theory*, 38, 3 (1999), 388–407. Emblematic of this debate, the two key works remain those of Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, 1996) and C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication, India 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁴ See Manu Goswami, *Producing India* (Chicago, 2004) for a repositioning of political economy as a counter-interpretation to the modular history of the nation.

The second and related question is, what can the study of South Asia do for intellectual history? All of the contributors to this collection question the assumption that concepts were diffused across the globe in a readily assimilable manner. Instead, we all argue that ideas and concepts only operate in a particular historical and cultural context and in so doing are transformed. Further, the analysis of this process of transformation often provides considerable insight into those concepts themselves. For instance, liberalism in Bayly's essay on Rammohan Roy emerges as a positive doctrine rather than simply as a doctrine of absence of coercion and this reinforces recent reinterpretations of liberalism in the British context. Moreover, such an enterprise can uncover neglected or assumed aspects of European history. In accounting for "Germanism", for instance, Sartori clarifies and deepens the distinctions between the meanings of "Rome" and "Greece" for contemporary ideas of culture and empire. Or, again, Kapila's essay makes it clear that Herbert Spencer's anti-imperialism was a position against the state rather than a theory of liberal imperialism itself. Finally, studying South Asian intellectual history compels scholars to take cognizance of a wider range of methods, texts and actors than any established canon of Western political thought would permit.

This preface ends by giving a synoptic account of the arguments of the contributions. For Wilson, who traverses the same terrain as Stokes and Guha, the idea of governmental practice is critical to the disruptive moment of colonialism. This challenges the idea of metropolitan "influence" that framed these earlier studies. For both Bayly and Jalal the global conjuncture offers a way of reinterpreting the thought of apparently well-known figures. Bayly, in putting Rammohan Roy into an international context of liberal constitutionalism, offers correctives to the received meaning of Indian liberalism and relocates Roy's "reformism" accordingly. With a similar methodological manoeuvre, Jalal resituates the "secularist" Muslim leader Maulana Azad's politics within the global world of pan-Islamism. By contrast, Devji overtly poses the question of the disjuncture of ideas at a global level and asks how, in late nineteenth-century Muslim thought, that disjuncture was productive of a political theory of the present.

Sartori explicitly moves away from representational issues of culture. His alternative approach to the imagining of particular categories belies the notion of "cultural contact" as the context through which ideas travelled or were recast. The immanence of "Germanism" in Bengal is understood not simply as the derivation of an originary idea. Instead, Sartori argues that German philosophy was already "over-determined" by Victorian thought. Taken together, the essays by Sartori, Dodson and Majeed, albeit with quite different points of view, ask new questions by circumventing the Saidian paradigm of power and representation. For Dodson, social practices that precondition epistemologies

themselves enable the reconstitution of categories such as antiquity and history. For Majeed, literary strategies help account for radical innovations of the self's relation to the nation and interiority. Finally, the question of the nation in these essays is neither a neatly anticipated category nor one that can subsume the whole political life of ideas during the period. Bose disrupts the received canon of nationalist thought and its relation to religion by revisiting the polity as imagined by Aurobindo Ghosh. Kapila, in explaining the analogies and disjunctions between Spencer and radical nationalist thought, considers the politics of the self as both under-and over-determined by the nation, but as in no way synonymous with the nation.

At a superficial glance, the articles here would seem to follow the rhythm and trajectory of the established narrative of political thought, moving easily from constitutional liberalism to nationalism. Yet, though by no means exhaustive, the essays reposition categories of religion, culture, self and the nation in a way that both intersects with and disrupts this neat unfolding of the "big ideas" of the last two centuries. While putting at their centre the power and life of ideas, these essays taken together open up discussion of an intermediate history of connections between ideas and practice, and between South Asia and the global arena of modern intellectual history.

This collection of articles arose out of discussions at two workshops – the first at Tufts University in April 2005 and the second at King's College, Cambridge, in July 2006. I am grateful to Kevin Dunn and the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Ayesha Jalal of the Center for South Asian and Indian Ocean Studies, Leila Fawaz of the Fares Center and the Department of History at Tufts for their generous support. Chris Bayly organized the second meeting at Cambridge with support from Emma Rothschild of the Centre for History and Economics and administrative assistance from Inga Huld Markan. The second workshop was held under the auspices of the Andrew W. Mellon Project for the exchange of economic and political ideas since 1760. I am grateful to Chris Bayly, whose intellectual generosity made many of these conversations possible and finally I thank David Armitage of the editorial board of the special issue of the journal *Modern Intellectual History* (CUP) who saw the potential in this collection of articles.

ANXIETIES OF DISTANCE: CODIFICATION IN EARLY COLONIAL BENGAL

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Historians of political thought tend to emphasize the continuous flow and transmission of concepts from one generation to the next, and from one place to another. Historians of Indian ideas suggest that India was governed with concepts imported from Europe. This article argues instead that the sense of rupture that British officials experienced, from both the intellectual history of Britain and Indian society, played a significant role in forming colonial political culture. It examines the practice of "Hindu" property law in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bengal. It suggests that the attempt to textualize and codify law in the 1810s and 1820s emerged from British doubts about their ability to construct viable forms of rule on the basis of existing intellectual and institutional traditions. The abstract and seemingly "utilitarian" tone of colonial political discourse was a practical response to British anxieties about their distance from Indian society. It was not a result of the "influence" of a particular school of British thinkers.

In the classic form in which British and American scholars have practised it for the last twenty or thirty years, intellectual history presupposes the idea of a continuously evolving intellectual tradition. Intellectual historians explain each moment in the history of political thought by showing how it relates to the concepts that existed beforehand. What is specific about a particular text is the way its author has consciously repeated or altered the intellectual conventions inherited from the immediate past. Political thinkers were consciously engaging with a continuous stream of political discourse. They existed within, but were constantly reshaping, a set of evolving intellectual traditions.¹

¹ The classic definition of this approach is Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in James Tully, ed., *Meaning in Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Oxford, 1988), 29–67; for the importance of tradition see Cary J. Needeman, "Quentin Skinner's State: Historical Method and Traditions of Discourse", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 18, 2 (1985), 339–52 and Peter L. Janssen, "Political Thought as Traditionary Action", *History and Theory*, 24, 2 (1985), 115–46. For an important discussion on colonial anxiety which this essay seeks to develop see Ranajit Guha, 'Not Home at Empire', *Critical Inquiry*, 23, 3 (1997), pp. 482–493.

Because it explains each political text by placing it in the context of concepts inherited from the immediate past, this Anglo-American style of intellectual history is uncomfortable with moments of rupture or sudden transformation.

Like many other moments of political transformation in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, the emergence of a colonial regime in South Asia was seen as a moment of rupture by its protagonists and subjects, and has been regarded in the same way by historians since. In ruling India, the East India Company's British officials believed they were doing something that had no precedent. From the early nineteenth century, in some cases a little earlier, Indian intellectuals often articulated a sense that colonial rule intruded new forms of thinking and acting into existing forms of thought and action. The Indian historian and official Ghulam Hussein articulated this sense of rupture by noting that the British were "strangers" to India's Mughal administrative traditions.² A similar feeling was recognized by the British officer Thomas Munro when he described British rule as "the domination of strangers".³ Speaking in the House of Commons in 1833, Thomas Macaulay argued that previous forms of political experience offered no guide for British rule. Britain's strange position in India meant that the "light of political science and of history are withdrawn: we are walking in darkness: we do not distinctly see whether we are going".⁴ The question of rupture, of a break with established ways of thinking about politics inherited from the past, is hard to avoid in the history of political and legal thought in colonial South Asia.

In the Indian subcontinent that sense of rupture produced a new form of authoritarian liberalism⁵ in which new concepts of "state" and "society" emerged. In the early nineteenth century, British officials began to see the colonial state as an actor with the capacity to intervene upon the actions of Indians whose conduct was determined by the autonomous economic, cultural or religious regularities of social life. They endlessly debated the legitimacy of one act of "interference" or another. In doing so, they invoked a conception of the state as an entity separate from the domain of Indian social practice. Similarly, Indian intellectuals began to imagine that they belonged to communities united by common forms of social conduct that existed in a sphere distinct from the realm of political action. In an essay published in 1830 Rammohan Roy spoke of the "the social institution of the Hindu community of Bengal" as an entity which needed to be protected, but not interfered with, by the institutions of the

² Ghulam Hussein Khan, *The Seir Mutaquerin*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1902), 3: 191–2.

³ Minute, 12 April 1822, quoted in Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro* (Delhi, 1989), 285.

⁴ "Government of India", 10 July 1833, in *The Works of Lord Macaulay*, ed. Lady Trevelyan, 8 vols. (London, 1866), 8: 120.

⁵ I am indebted to C.A. Bayly for this phrase.

colonial state.⁶ Three-quarters of a century later, Rabindranath Tagore articulated a stronger conception of the separation of society from the authoritarian institutions of the state. Tagore argued that the heart of the nation lay in India's "social body" or *samaj*. In England he believed the life of society was bound up with the life of the state. But in India it was the autonomous sphere of social life, not political conduct, which determined the destiny of the community at large.⁷

In the early colonial period the complex forms of allegiance, deference and negotiation that had constituted the province's early modern polities were replaced by a political culture which emphasized a rigid demarcation between the "state" on the one hand and Indian "society" on the other. One of the most important aspects of this early colonial political culture was the attempt to define the law that governed social conduct in pithy, textual rules. In the first half of the nineteenth century—if not for later commentators such as Tagore—the rule-making sphere of colonial juridical practice provided a central frame of reference for an emerging concern with the autonomy of India's social, cultural, religious and economic spheres from the distant world of political power.

Both the idea that social practice could only be governed if it was codified in an abstract rule form, and an accompanying concern about the relationship between social practice and the rule-making power of the state, were dominant themes in nineteenth-century Indian political and social thought. My concern in this essay is to explain the emergence of that concern with rules, examining in particular the origins of the colonial attempt to codify law in pithy, textual forms. When they trace the emergence of these themes, historians tend to rely too much on the "influence" of British ideas. In the late 1950s Eric Stokes suggested that the philosophy of utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill had a significant role in shaping the course of British administration. Stokes argued that the early colonial emphasis on codification occurred because of the influence of a particular strand of British thought.⁸ Yet, as Quentin Skinner argued many years ago, "influence" is a very difficult methodological tool to deploy successfully in the history of ideas.⁹ Identifying a colonial concern with the production of written rules in India is not sufficient to demonstrate the global effects of utilitarian philosophy. Such an attempt discounts the possibility that the ideas that emerged in a different place might have had a different genealogy.

⁶ Raja Rammohan Roy, "Essay on the Rights of Hindoos over Ancestral Property", in *idem*, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 6 vols. (Calcutta, 1945–58), 2: 35.

⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, "Our Swadeshi Samaj" (1904–5) in *idem*, *Greater India* (New Delhi, 2003), 30–32.

⁸ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), particularly chap. III.

⁹ Quentin Skinner, "The Limits of Historical Explanation", *Philosophy*, 41 (1966), 199–215.

The emphasis on British “influence” also wrongly presupposes the existence of a coherent intellectual tradition in Britain that emphasized the need to codify law.

Rather than attributing these new colonial concepts to the influential continuities of British intellectual history, I argue here that the urge to codify emerged from British anxieties about their disconnection, their rupture, from the complex, practical world of precolonial Indian politics. To show this, the essay examines the British approach to one area where they tried to engage with a precolonial Indian “tradition”, the inheritance of property by Hindu men and women in the province of Bengal. “Hindu” property law was the area of colonial juridical practice that elicited the greatest degree of concern. Hindus were wrongly identified as Bengal’s largest social group, and property was vital to the British attempt to find stable sources of revenue. The law that governed property within Hindu families developed into one of the most politically important areas of colonial jurisprudence, as juridical definitions of Hindu social practice played an important role in the definition of ideas of a Hindu “national” community that was seen as distinct from British and Indian Muslim “outsiders” in the later nineteenth century. As I shall suggest, the assumption that the property of all Hindus was governed by a single set of rules was something that emerged over time within the practices of authoritarian liberalism in colonial Bengal.

* * *

Let me introduce my subject with a story about one particular case of law, a dispute about inheritance from the district of Gaya in Bihar. In early colonial India, Bihar was governed as part of the province of Bengal. Nonetheless many colonial officials believed it had its own distinctive legal tradition, distinguished from that in Bengal proper. The case focused on an issue that was widely debated at the time, and would become a target of political controversy later on: whether a Hindu widow could adopt a son without the approval of her deceased husband.

In eighteenth-century Bengal and Bihar, both Hindu and Muslim women were often substantial property holders. In some cases they possessed and managed property on behalf of male relatives, on other occasions holding land in their own right after their husband died. In the years before British rule, women held far more property than they did in the nineteenth century. But their property was vulnerable to competing claims by locally powerful men. For example, Hindu jurists debated whether or not Hindu widows could adopt new heirs and transfer property to them without approval from their deceased husbands, although in

practice many did. Men often tried to use such juridical arguments to dispossess their female relatives.

In 1780 a boy called Bhola Dhami had been adopted by Nawazu, the widow of his birth uncle Krishna Chandra Dhama in the town of Mirzapur, in the district of Gaya in Bihar. Bhola Dhami's name was not mentioned by Nawazu's husband before he died. As Nawazu's adopted son, however, Bhola Dhami acquired the right to inherit the house in Mirzapur in which they both lived and other property. As the boy grew up, Nawazu and her adopted son argued vehemently. Eventually the widow ejected Bhola Dhami, then in his mid-twenties, from their joint house. Nawazu tried to nullify her original adoption of the boy, insisting that she be allowed to adopt her daughter's child Musan Dhami as an heir instead. Bhola Dhami sued Nawazu in the Gaya court in 1800 to reclaim the property, on the grounds that the second adoption was invalid because it did not have her deceased husband's consent.¹⁰

In early colonial Bengal and Bihar, the district court was staffed by a British judge and roughly twenty Indian subordinate officials. In determining disputes, the most important Indian officers were the *pandit* and the *qazi*, men who were supposed to provide advice on Hindu and Muslim law respectively. District judges had very little legal training. From the early nineteenth century, they were educated in Indian languages and European "science" at Fort William College and, later, Haileybury College.¹¹ But they had little exposure to the complex practices of either English or Indian law. Indian officers learnt their craft in a complex range of regional and local traditions of ethical and juridical scholarship that interpreted texts within forms of orally transmitted knowledge specific to local institutions that had their own particular styles of learning. Many *pandits* were taught at schools of Sanskrit learning at Nabadwip in Bengal or Tirhut in Bihar, but returned to the court in their own town. Frequently the position was passed from father to son, or master to pupil.¹²

The judge in Bhola Dhami's case initially asked for an opinion from the court's Hindu law officer, its *pandit*, to decide the dispute. The Indian officer, Bhara Bhatta, did so by referring to a variety of Hindu texts, notably Mitra Misra's medieval work on inheritance law. But the judge could not make sense

¹⁰ Jai Ram Dhami *et al.* vs. Musan Dhami, in W. H. MacNaghtenn, ed., *Reports on Cases Determined in the Sudder Dewanny Adawlut* (Calcutta, 1827–49), 5: 3–10. Subsequent references to the case are to this text.

¹¹ David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Berkeley, 1969).

¹² For the education of Bengali *pandits* see Samita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment* (Calcutta, 1993). Details of the education and "qualifications" of *pandits* and *qazis* formed a large part of the Governor General-in-Council's judicial proceedings during the 1790s.

of the *pandit's* *vyavastha* (opinion). He criticized its “inexplicitness”, a common complaint made about the advice of *pandits* and *qazis*. Instead of using the opinion, the judge asked another Indian official to write a report specifying what was the local “usage” which determined the adoption of children in Gaya. Articulating what, in the 1790s and 1800s, was a widespread view, the Company’s court saw local customs and usages—not ancient scriptural authority or codified texts—as the basis of Indian property law. After receiving the report, the judge was convinced that a local custom in Gaya allowed parents to disinherit their adopted children. Nawazu’s ability to adopt a second child was upheld, and Bhola Dhami’s claim dismissed.

This concern with custom, and the attempt to govern according to what British officials perceived were the local historical continuities of Indian society, was far more important to the initial phases of British rule than most historians have recognized. In the fractious world of colonial politics in the 1770s, this concern consisted of an attempt to discover the customary form of India’s precolonial political system. In their vicious arguments about the nature of British rule in Bengal, Governor General Warren Hastings and his arch enemy Philip Francis invoked very different notions of India’s “ancient constitution”.¹³ The various attempts that Hastings made to collect revenue and administer law were criticized as chaotic and arbitrary by politicians in London. The last years of Hastings’s rule, between 1782 and 1785, overlapped with a period of financial and political crisis for the East India Company, and the British Empire as a whole. Lord Cornwallis, the general defeated by the Americans at Yorktown, was sent to Bengal “to reform the Civil and Military establishment” and place British rule in Bengal “on a secure footing”.¹⁴ As P. J. Marshall notes, in reaction to Hastings’s rule “British administration in India would be more closely bound by rules and more distant from Indians”.¹⁵

One central aspect of this project was the attempt to restore the property rights that Bengal’s landholders or *zamindars* were supposed to have possessed a generation before. Ranajit Guha is wrong to suggest that the Company’s officials wanted to introduce a new “rule of property” to Bengal.¹⁶ Parliament had instructed the East India Company to administer existing property rights

¹³ Robert Travers, “Ideology and British Expansion in Bengal”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33, 1 (2005), 7–27.

¹⁴ William Pitt to Lord Cornwallis, 8 February 1785, National Archives 30/11/270, f.

¹⁵ P. J. Marshall, “Hastings, Warren (1732–1818)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edn, May 2006 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12587>; accessed 10 July 2006).

¹⁶ Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris, 1963).

according to “the laws and customs of the country”.¹⁷ Cornwallis’s aim was to “establish a constitution for the Country that will protect private property and with it the internal prosperity of the state”.¹⁸ British officials constructed new institutions—new courts and revenue offices—to govern existing social institutions.

The importance of custom in the British administration of Bengal reflects a broader emphasis on the historical continuity of political and juridical institutions in Britain itself. Political thinkers in eighteenth-century Britain often argued that trust in the customary, experiential continuities of particular institutions was essential to maintain the cohesion of political society.¹⁹ Many commentators, Edmund Burke being the most notable example, believed that rulers and subjects were bound together by the flexible historical continuities that existed in political, clerical and juridical institutions.²⁰ Those connections were supposed to tie subjects and rulers together within the institutions of propertied society. Property, and the forms of sociability it generated, were as important a part of the constitution as Westminster’s law courts or parliament.²¹ In the rhetoric of British political thinkers from Locke to Burke, the practice of institutions ranging from parliament and law courts to local corporations and manorial estates allowed disputes to be arbitrated and the trusting consensus of the population to be maintained.

British politicians and jurists believed that custom and shared forms of institutional practice were important foundations of political society. Consequently, it was impossible for late eighteenth-century British political thinkers to countenance the idea of defining the “law” in a set of abstract, pithy rules. Such a move would have created an artificial separation between a legislative state and the social relations it ruled in a way that eighteenth-century Britons found difficult to countenance. Instead, Britons viewed the law as a set of institutions that were embedded within propertied social practice itself. The common law was “endogenous”, as Gerard J. Postema puts it, to the “the matrix

¹⁷ 24 Geo III, c.25, s.39.

¹⁸ Cornwallis, “Minute on the administration of justice”, 11 February 1793, Bengal Revenue Proceedings, IOR P/52/55, p. 201.

¹⁹ For example, Peter Mandler, “The Nation and Power in the Liberal State: Britain, c. 1800–1914”, in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge, 2005), 354–69.

²⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1972); Richard Bourke, “Liberty, Authority, and Trust in Burke’s Idea of Empire”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61, 3 (2000), 453–71; Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago, 1999), 36–45.

²¹ Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991).

of social life”.²² Lawyers often criticized attempts to codify or rationalize as liable to cause confusion and consolidate arbitrary power. The lawyer and Calcutta judge William Jones, a man we shall meet again in a moment, offered such a critique when he noted that Blackstone wrongly defined law as “a rule prescribed by a superior power” instead of “the will of the whole community as far as it can be collected with convenience”.²³ Jones believed it was the customary practice of the court, not the election of MPs to parliament, that allowed the people’s will to be discerned.

Initially, the emphasis on property and custom in early colonial Bengal reflected these metropolitan concerns. Nonetheless, during the 1780s and 1790s, a Burkean emphasis on conserving customary property was accompanied by a sense of distrust about India’s political institutions. In Britain, politics could not be disassociated from property. In Bengal, British officials held a positive view of the “usages” and “customs” they believed existed beyond the court in Indian social life. But they were mistrustful of the precolonial Indian institutions that had governed those usages before British rule. In particular, an Anglo-chauvinistic rhetoric about the tendency towards decline in so-called “despotic” societies was used to condemn surviving precolonial offices as corrupt and degenerate: as incapable of upholding the rules of customary property law.²⁴ This critique led to the removal of Indian proprietors from positions of political responsibility, reducing Indian officials to informants and agents rather than participants in Bengal’s political society.

As a result of this critique, positions in which individuals might have developed a customary sense of the habits and practices of local society were abolished. For example, the office of district *qanungu*, “expounder of laws and customs”, was removed in 1793, a measure that some British district officers objected to. The collector of Jessore district suggested that *qanungus* were “the people to whom Government should look for the fullest information on the State of the district”.²⁵ But Cornwallis and his colleagues in the Governor General’s Council argued that the *qanungu*’s deep-rooted immersion in the historical continuities of a particular local society made them easily corrupted by local landholders, liable to engage in conspiracies to defraud the Company. Their links with local political society could have made them valuable

²² Gerald J. Postema, *Bentham and the Common Law Tradition* (Oxford, 1986), 314.

²³ Michael Lobban, *The Common Law and English Jurisprudence, 1760–1850* (Oxford, 1991), 47–56; William Jones to Viscount Althorp, 21 November 1777, in *The Letters of William Jones*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford, 1970), 333.

²⁴ For example John Shore, Minute, 18 June 1789, in W. K. Firminger, ed., *Fifth Report on East India Affairs*, 3 vols. (Calcutta, 1913), 43.

²⁵ R. Rocke to Board of Revenue, 10 June 1790, Bengal Revenue Consultations, 11 March 1791, IOR P/152/27.

agents of British rule. But these local connections also made them dangerous to a distant official class that was not confident about its ability to detect fraud.

British officials were anxious about their ability to understand what was really going on beneath the surface of existing local institutions. This anxiety was initially mitigated by an overconfident view of the Company's ability to find alternative sources of local information, and a fantasy about the power of colonial transcription. Cornwallis argued that *qanungus* were unnecessary because, for the most part, customary rights "had been reduced to writing". But he went on to argue that "if a local custom is required to be ascertained, better evidence regarding it will always be obtainable from inhabitants of the district of a respectable character, than could be procured from the Mofussil [district] Canoongoes".²⁶ Quite how the "character" of local inhabitants could be gauged without a sense of trust in local political institutions was not something Cornwallis considered.

The "constitution" that Lord Cornwallis established between 1786 and 1793 was founded on a paradox. It reflected a Burkean concern with the forms of trust and customary connection which allowed a civilized, commercial society to occur. Yet in Bengal the connection between existing political institutions and the customary property rights that they upheld was severed. British rule in Bengal began to be based on a stark sense of distance between the world of government and the social relations it governed.

The strange concatenation of custom and distance produced a complex range of responses in the practice and thought of British administration during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First of all, it produced the kind of perplexity that the judge of Gaya articulated in the Bhola Dhami case. The judge wanted to rely on a local Indian officer's established sense of existing law. But his distance from, and mistrust of, the institutionalized forms of reasoning that the *pandit* used forced him to abandon his attempt to resolve the dispute with established practices that existed within the court. As a consequence, in the 1790s and early 1800s, district judges rarely attempted to decide cases based on an Indian legal official's advice alone. Instead, they appealed to customs that were supposed to exist in the social life outside the court.²⁷ Yet customs of the kind they invoked were an insecure basis for judicial certainty. The judge in Gaya was able to temporarily resolve the Bhola Dhami dispute. As we shall see in a moment, the decision was repeatedly challenged as it slowly wound its way

²⁶ Cornwallis, "Minute on the administration of Justice", 319.

²⁷ For example, *Bimala vs. Gokul Nath Ray*, S[udder] D[ewanny] A[dawlut] Proceedings, 21 August 1799, no. 1, IOR P/154/8; *Joy Narayan Qanungu vs. Debi Prasad*, *ibid.*, 5 June 1794, nos. 61–3, IOR P/152/45.

through the British regime's courts from the district to the highest court in Calcutta. In practice, British judicial officials rarely had any basis to decide whether the interpretation of custom presented by one party in the dispute was more valid than that presented by another. Officials frequently complained about having "no rule" to guide their decision-making. District officials often anxiously called on the Judicial Board or appeal court in Calcutta for instructions to decide irresolvable disputes.²⁸

The early colonial emphasis on "custom" and "usage" also resulted in the production of new texts, works such as *Digest of Hindu Law* begun by William Jones and completed by H. T. Colebrooke after his death. The *Digest*, printed in Calcutta in 1798 and then published in London three years later, was the second work published in English on Hindu law.²⁹ The first, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *Code of Gentoo Law*, was little more than a piece of propaganda produced within the battles that raged in London during the 1770s about the Company's government.³⁰ In contrast, Jones and Colebrooke's text was intended as a practical guide for British officers deciding property cases in Bengal. The text was a translation of a Sanskrit commentary on property, contracts and inheritance written by Jagannatha Tarkapanchanam, the most widely respected Hindu jurist in eastern India during the late eighteenth century. Jones originally intended it to accompany a digest of Muslim property law, but this text was never completed.

The *Digest* was not an attempt to "codify" Hindu law. Instead, its British publishers meant it to be a compilation of existing usage, intending to represent existing practice rather than define law. Its purpose was to ensure that Indians were governed with "those laws, which the parties themselves had ever considered as the rules of their conduct and engagements in civil life".³¹ Like other officers, Jones believed those rules had been sanctioned by the customary interaction between individuals and courts, not the authority of a sovereign that established a textual law. Neither Jones nor Colebrooke believed there was a single, coherent body of textual Hindu law. The final version of the *Digest* contained a number of footnotes that explained differences in the customary practices of different communities and social groups.³² The text was meant to

²⁸ For example, Thomas Brooke, Collector of Birbhum to SDA, 2 May 1794, SDA Proceedings, 5 June 1794, IOR P/152/45.

²⁹ H. T. Colebrooke, ed., *A Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Successions, with a Commentary*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1798).

³⁰ Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (London, 1776).

³¹ William Jones to Lord Cornwallis, 19 March 1788, in *The Letters of William Jones*, 795–6.

³² For example, Colebrooke, *Digest*, 3: 276 and 460.

supplement, not replace, the practical adjudicative processes which *pandits* and judges engaged with in court.

Nonetheless, the *Digest* was produced because British officers mistrusted Indian juridical institutions to begin with. Jones argued that the text was necessary to prevent the Company's judges from being cheated by their Indian employees. "If we give judgment only from the opinions of the native lawyers and scholars, we can never be sure that we have not been deceived by them", Jones had suggested, especially "in any cause in which they could have the remotest interest in deceiving the court".³³ British distance from the forms of reasoning that underpinned Indian juridical practice led them to produce a text which allowed officials to "check" Indian opinions.

The *Digest* was circulated to all district courts. But the work was not used in practice. Unfamiliar as they were with the practice of Indian logic, British judicial officials found the book difficult to use whilst deciding property disputes. If judges understood Indian jurisprudence well enough to use the *Digest*, why did they need it at all? As Colebrooke later admitted, the text was "little utility to persons conversant with the law, and of still less service to those who are not conversant with Indian jurisprudence".³⁴

However they tried to do so, officials found it difficult to "discover" customs and usages that had the certainty or stability to be used to decide a case in court. Eastern India's law of property was increasingly seen as, to quote the judicial official Alexander Tytler, "*jus vaguum et incognito*"—vague and unknown law.³⁵ The Calcutta judge Sir Francis Workman MacNaghten suggested that "all claims may be countenanced, all decrees may be sanctioned by authority" in British courts.³⁶ Writing in 1820 on the basis of his experience throughout British India, the newly appointed governor of Bombay Mountstuart Elphinstone noted the "looseness" and "contradictions" inherent in both textual and customary Indian jurisprudence as it was administered in British courts. In a letter to the retired Bengal officer Edward Strachey, Elphinstone noted that it was "the custom of the country which regulates most things" in the countryside. But, he continued, "the difficulty of ascertaining it is so great, that you may doubtless recollect civil suits in which you have spent days examining the

³³ Jones to Cornwallis, 19 March 1788, *Letters of Sir William Jones*, 796.

³⁴ H. T. Colebrooke, ed., *Two Treatises on the Hindu Law of Inheritance* (Calcutta, 1810); T. E. Colebrooke, ed., *Miscellaneous Essays [of H.T. Colebrooke], with Life of the Author*, 2 vols. (London, 1873), 1: 12.

³⁵ Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Considerations on the Present Political State of India*, 2 vols. (London, 1815), 2: 198.

³⁶ Sir Francis Workman MacNaghten, *Considerations on the Hindoo Law as It Is Current in Bengal* (Serampore, 1824), xii.

evidence, to find out what is the custom on some issue, and yet have been diffident in your own decision after all". For Elphinstone, all that really existed were a set of medieval texts that no one properly understood and some "loose traditional notions" that did not represent a coherent system of "law" at all. "The uncertainty of all decisions obtained from such sources must be obvious, especially when required for the guidance of a foreign judge", he noted.³⁷

The solution that Elphinstone and other officials proposed was to publish an authoritative set of rules in a pithy form—to codify law, in other words. In Calcutta the first decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new generation of texts that did exactly that. In 1810 H.T. Colebrooke tried to introduce greater certainty by translating a set of "ancient" Hindu texts that were supposed to provide a more stable source of judicial authority than the *Digest* could.³⁸ For Colebrooke certainty lay in evoking the fantasy of an unchanging canon of textual Hindu law. Yet that fantasy still left too much room open for interpretation. Judges still needed to understand the logic of Indian jurisprudence to understand Colebrooke's texts. Consequently, a number of colonial jurists, most notably the *Sadr Diwani Adalat* register W. H. MacNaghten and his father, the Supreme Court judge Sir Francis Workman, produced their own compilations of Hindu and Muslim property law.³⁹ These texts distilled simple rules from the *dharmaśāstras* and previous colonial decisions. They were intended to provide judicial certainty in court by offering a set of consistent, authoritative rules that covered every point of law, something that neither Indian *pandits* nor translations of Indian works could provide. They consisted of a conscious attempt to rationalize and reconstruct—rather than merely represent—Indian jurisprudence. Elphinstone's rationalizing intention had been clear. His aim had been to "compile a complete and consistent code from the mass of written law and the fragments of tradition, determining on general principles of jurisprudence those points where the Hindoo books and traditions present only conflicting authorities".⁴⁰

William MacNaghten intended his texts to "fix" the many points "where a contrariety of opinion has hitherto prevailed". It did not matter how disputed points were decided, as long as they were "finally determined one way or the

³⁷ Elphinstone to Edward Strachey, 3 September 1820; and "Minute of Governor of Bombay", July 1823, in Thomas Edward Colebrooke, *Life of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone*, 2 vols. (London, 1884), 2: 116 and 115.

³⁸ Colebrooke, *Two Treatises*.

³⁹ W. H. Macnaghten, *Principles and Precedents of Moohummudan Law*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1825); W. H. Macnaghten, *Principles and Precedents of Hindu Law*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1829).

⁴⁰ Colebrooke, *Elphinstone*, 2: 115.

other” with a straightforward, authoritative rule. MacNaghten argued that the mode “is nothing:—the determination is everything”.⁴¹

If it had been articulated in London, such a statement would have shocked English lawyers, and much of the political public besides. Well into the nineteenth century, most English jurists argued that customary processes of adjudication rather than abstract rules of decision offered the way to resolve disputes with certainty. Yet, in Bengal, officials’ sense that they were “strangers” or “foreigners” to Indian ways of doing things produced a far more positive attitude to the production of abstract codes of law. Officials found it difficult to trust the “endogamous” institutional processes that might have connected Indian society to colonial political institutions. Instead they began to rely on authoritative rules that were created and existed outside the court. Colonial officials responded to their distance from Indian forms of adjudication by treating abstract, textual rules as the source of law for the first time.

We can see this new legal philosophy at work if we return to Bhola Dhami’s case for a moment. The dispute between Nawazu and Bhola Dhami had simmered on through the 1800s and early 1810s, and continued into the next generation. The dispute came before the regional appeal court in Patna in 1819. Here, instead of referring to local “usage”, the court engaged in a far more detailed discussion of textual Hindu law. The three judges who sat in the court, Smith, Eliot and Fleming, referred the case back to the new *pandit* of Gaya district. Operating within the analogical conventions of *dharmaśāstrik* analysis, Lila Dhar used Mitra Misra’s commentaries to argue that the husband’s consent was inferred automatically. The court found this answer inexplicable. In 1800 the Gaya court had no framework to engage in a discussion of Hindu texts at all. By 1819 British officials had developed their own, literal understanding of Hindu doctrine, and believed that Hindu law could be reduced to a set of general, pithy rules. The dispute revolved around the question of whether all Hindus in the province of Bihar were governed by a different law from that of their compatriots in Bengal. The judges noted that “Hindu law current in Behar” had established a clear rule that decreed that widows could not adopt without the explicit consent of their husbands. They were clear enough about their own interpretation of the rules of Hindu law to reject the *pandit*’s decision and deny the validity of Nawazu’s second adoption.

The dispute was heard a final time, in the *Sadr Diwani Adalat*, the highest Bengal appeal court, in 1831. Then it was the court’s *pandits* who argued that social practice was defined by pithy, textual rules. In doing so, they claimed that Hindus across eastern India—Bihar and Bengal—were governed by a single set of rules. “There was no text”, the *pandits* said, “in any book current in either

⁴¹ MacNaghten, *Principles of Hindu Law*, iv–v.

Bengal or Bihar” which allowed a woman “to affiliate a son given without the leave of her husband”. By the early 1830s, for most British officials and some of their Indian interlocutors, “Hindu law” had become a single set of universally applicable, textual rules that applied to all Hindus.⁴²

* * *

As I noted earlier, Eric Stokes argued that it was the “influence” of utilitarian political philosophy that led British officials to codify law in India. Jeremy Bentham and James Mill were the most fervent advocates of codification in early nineteenth-century Britain. Yet the imperial officers whom Stokes believed introduced utilitarian philosophy to India were unlikely Benthamites. Thomas Macaulay, appointed as the first law member of the Legislative Council, had been one of James Mill’s greatest critics in London.⁴³ For the most part, the Britons who governed India were men who wished the evolving continuities of metropolitan political society to be gradually reformed. They did not advocate the radical restructuring of their own constitution with abstract codes of law.

I have argued in this essay that changing colonial attitudes to law in Bengal emerged from the practical processes of British administration rather than the influence of a particular tradition of European thought. Examining those processes allows one to explain why fervent critics of codification in Britain were staunch supporters in the subcontinent; why, in other words, different political concepts emerged in the institutional space of colonial India. Despite the different circumstances that led to its emergence, the urge by both colonial officers and “English” utilitarians to codify was guided by a similar concern: a lack of faith in customary practice and institutional continuity as the root of certain forms of law.⁴⁴ In both contexts, the desire to define the law in authoritative, textual rules was driven by a sense of mistrust of and distance from the complex practices of reasoning that had guided juridical decision-making before, a sense which made practices of customary adjudication seem chaotic at best, fraudulent and corrupt at worst. For different reasons, English utilitarians and colonial officials in India felt they were unable to act within the practical goals and habitual conventions that governed juridical decision-making in the institutional worlds they inhabited.

⁴² Jai Ram Dhami *et al.* vs. Musan Dhami, in W. H. MacNaghten, ed., *Reports on Cases Determined in the Sudder Dewanny Adawlut*, 5: 3–7.

⁴³ See the essays collected in Jack Lively and John Rees, *Utilitarian Logic and Politics: Mill’s Essay on Government, Macaulay’s Critique and the Ensuing Debate* (Oxford, 1978).

⁴⁴ Ross Harrison, *Bentham* (London, 1983); David Lieberman, *The Province of Legislation Determined* (Cambridge, 1989), 219–40.

Instead, they needed to step outside those traditions to use texts to produce an entirely new kind of law.

Yet if they were not based on the “traditional” practices of custom or processes of Indian jurisprudence, by what authority were the rules that governed Indian property sanctioned? Instead of ruling with the custom, officials in India—just like Bentham and Mill—began to invoke the legislative power of the state far more. In the late eighteenth century the Company in Calcutta had issued “regulations” whose intention was to do no more than manage the institutions that governed existing forms of social relations. But in the early nineteenth century officials began to explicitly reframe the Company’s relationship with “law”. The parliamentary statute that renewed the Company’s charter in 1833 added a fourth “law member” to the governing council. The Governor General’s Council was expanded to become “the supreme legislative power” for British India. A Law Commission was appointed in 1834. It was Macaulay who led the Charter Bill through the House of Commons, arguing that a “Code is almost the only blessing . . . which absolute governments are better fitted to confer on a nation than popular governments”. To begin with, Macaulay’s commission intended to codify Hindu law.⁴⁵

In the late 1820s and early 1830s even the most committed “orientalist” shared what looks, superficially, like a “utilitarian” emphasis on the need for the legislative power of the state to sanction a code of Hindu law. The sometime chief justice of the *Sadr Diwani Adalat* William Butterworth Bayley is usually seen as “a conservative administrator”, hostile to “new philosophies of government”.⁴⁶ Yet in his evidence before the House of Commons Select Committee in 1833, Bayley was as fervent an advocate of codification as Mill or Macaulay. Bayley quoted James Mill, arguing that a code needed to be compiled “on rational lines”, then “promulgated” by the legislative authority of the colonial state. Despite the work of MacNaghten and others the project of “codification”—Bayley used the Benthamite word—was still incomplete.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, the East India Company’s new legislative state was an ambivalent entity, persistently uncertain where it needed to direct its sovereign force. Officials doubted that judicial certainty could exist without a code of Hindu law. But in India, Hindu inheritance law was not enshrined in statute until the independent Republic of India enacted its Hindu code between 1955 and 1961, although

⁴⁵ Thomas Macaulay, “Government of India”, 10 July 1833, *Works*, 8: 142.

⁴⁶ Katherine Prior, “Bayley, (William) Butterworth (1781–1860)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1758>; accessed 21 July 2006).

⁴⁷ William B. Bayley, “Evidence before the House of Commons Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company”, *Parliamentary Papers*, Irish University Series, ed. Sheila Lambert (Shannon, 1979), *East India* (1833), 1a: 114.

criminal and contract laws were codified in the 1860s and 1870s. Muslim law remains uncoded. The colonial regime's reticence about legislatively defining Hindu as well as Muslim law is significant, indicating an ambivalent attitude towards the law that governed domestic social practice. On the one hand, officials believed they were supposed to be governing the inheritance practices of Indians with the historic continuities of Indian law, which, from Colebrooke's early nineteenth-century enterprises onwards, were increasingly defined through printed translations of texts written in medieval and ancient India. Officials worried that enshrining the law that governed the social practice of Hindus or Muslims would spark resistance. Nonetheless, their distance from the practices of precolonial juridical decision-making meant that any attempt to govern with existing "law" required it to be dramatically reconstructed in a new form. The British were unable to trust any form of judicial authority not sanctioned by the positive command of the colonial state. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the colonial regime did not know whether to govern with the supposedly indigenous forms of law that it found difficult to understand, or to actively make new laws. The creation of new forms of writing which defined the rules that governed Indian social conduct emerged alongside a positivistic yet ambivalent conception of the authority of the colonial legislature. These new concepts, which had powerful effects in later Indian political life, emerged because officials were unable to detect and work within political and juridical traditions of the kind they might have inhabited more easily at "home".

The concepts I have traced in this chapter emerged within the institutional practices of colonial Bengal. They were, however, part of a global process in which regimes across Europe and America as well as Asia codified law. In the early nineteenth century only a few polities—Britain and Catalonia were two—resisted the urge to codify. As in Bengal, codification emerged alongside the new idea that "national" communities were defined by a single set of shared social practices that was enshrined in authoritative textual rules.⁴⁸

These new ways of thinking about society, sovereignty and law cannot be explained merely by the transference of ideas across the globe, although the conjuncture of concepts from different places played its part. Instead, they emerged as analogous practical political contexts which allowed similar concepts to emerge. One might tentatively suggest that in each place where codification happened it occurred because political actors doubted their ability to construct

⁴⁸ For Britain see Michael Lobban, *The Common Law and English Jurisprudence*; for Catalonia see Stephen Jacobson, "Law and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Case of Catalonia in Comparative Perspective", *Law and History Review*, 20 (2002), 307–47; for the emergence of new legal philosophies in the United States see Daniel Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664–1830* (Durham, NC, 2005).

viable forms of rule on the basis of existing intellectual and institutional traditions alone. As the networks that sustained “old regime” politics fragmented in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, political actors in many different places adopted new textual techniques and developed new concepts of sovereignty to define and govern social conduct in a more anxious world.⁴⁹ Codification occurred where political actors felt a sense of rupture with the past. As a consequence, its emergence cannot be understood with a style of intellectual history that explains texts only within the parochial contexts of continuous traditions of thought.

⁴⁹ For a broader set of arguments about the demise of “old-regime” politics and emergence of increasingly homogenous forms of social and cultural identity in the nineteenth century, see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (London, 2004).

RAMMOHAN ROY AND THE ADVENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERALISM IN INDIA, 1800–30*

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This paper concerns the reformulation by British expatriates and the first generation of English-speaking Indian intellectuals of the key ideas of European constitutional liberalism between 1810 and 1835. The central figure is Rammohan Roy, usually seen as a “reformer” of Hinduism. Here Rammohan’s thought is set in the context of the Iberian and Latin American constitutional revolutions and the movement for free trade and parliamentary reform in Britain. Rammohan and his coevals created a constitutional history for India that centred on the institution of the panchayat, a local judicial body. While some expatriates and Indian radicals discussed “independence” or “separation” for the country as early as the 1830s, Rammohan himself argued for constitutional limitations on the Company’s power and Indian representation in Parliament. Under liberal British government, he believed, an Indian public would emerge, empowered by service on juries and the operations of a free press.

This paper seeks to situate the dramatic emergence of modern Indian liberal thought during the 1810s and 1820s in a wider Asian, European and American context, further developing the notion of a global or trans-national sphere of intellectual history. From the perspective of British and British imperial history, the paper contributes to the story of how provincial and overseas interests came together to construct an ideological challenge to the “despotism” of the Court of Directors of the East India Company. British radicals and the still small group of English-educated Indian public men gathered in Bombay and Calcutta viewed the Company as the epitome of metropolitan Toryism and a classic form of the “old corruption”. The concern of the paper is not to insert the Indian political ideas of this period into broad, predetermined teleological categories such as “old patriotism”, colonial modernity, nationalist modernity, multiple

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modernity and so on as historians of India have been inclined to do. Rather, it is to consider the political ideas in their own terms and in their own period, neither lauding a culturally authentic Indian renaissance nor simply treating the debates of these years as derivative of Western intellectual prowess.

Some contemporary theorists view liberalism as a general doctrine of absences: liberty from political, religious or intellectual oppression, but with little positive commitment to civic virtue. The early Indian and expatriate British liberals discussed here emerged out of a specific intellectual context. They feared the tyrannical features of the French Revolution as much as those of the returning monarchical despotisms of 1815. Yet, though cautious, their liberalism was constructive. They were advocates of “mixed” constitutional government, republican in spirit, but leaving space for popular monarchies. They assigned a critical role to a free press and local forms of representation. They wished to build “a public” in India. But they were often conservative or, rather, Whiggish in their attitude to property, believing that large landed proprietors stabilized society, unlike their more radical successors of a few years later.

I begin with a description of a striking event that took place in Calcutta in August 1822 on the banks of the River Hughly and later in the Calcutta Town Hall. This was a celebration of the second anniversary of the proclamation of constitutional government in Portugal. It was recorded by two Calcutta newspapers, the *Bengal Hurkaru* (the word means “messenger”), a free-trading liberal newspaper, and the *Calcutta Journal*. The *Journal* was India’s first daily newspaper, a radical publication edited by the later parliamentary reformer James Silk Buckingham, who was soon to be arrested and transported back to Britain by the Company’s government. According to the *Journal* the huge crowd at the river included “the children of Lusitania” along with “those of Britain and India”, government officials, ecclesiastics of the Roman church and other creeds wearing, unusually, the cockade symbol of liberty. Along with them stood “the enlightened Brahmin whose name is never mentioned without praise”.¹ This was Rammohan Roy, the main focus of the essay, and someone who is rightly regarded as India’s first consciously modern political thinker. The *Calcutta Journal* demanded rhetorically, “who shall henceforth dare to say that Public Opinion is not favourable to the spread of liberal sentiments in India?”

The other main liberal publication, the *Hurkaru*, carried a long report on the subsequent dinner.² “European Portuguese from Lisbon and the Brazils” hosted the dinner. But many local Portuguese and Eurasian Portuguese from Calcutta and the Bengal countryside attended as their guests. According to Messrs Pires and de Silva, Portugal had finally been delivered from the “thralldom of priest

¹ *Calcutta Journal*, 27 August 1822.

² *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27 August 1822.

craft and the fetters of despotism". The Spanish nation had been the first to raise the standard of liberty in 1812, but soon, it was said, "the cause of liberty will be as famous and triumphant as in the days of Cato and Brutus". The speeches at the dinner illustrated the range of international constitutional liberalism at this particular moment. The breadth of Iberian liberal connections across the world was also highlighted by a solemn act of remembrance of a Portuguese patriot in Goa who had been assassinated on the orders of the reactionary Portuguese monarchy, then installed in Rio de Janeiro. India indeed had direct experience of European revolutions. A series of liberal coups and monarchical counter-coups was taking place in what are now the major holiday venues of western India. Liberals in Goa, mainly creoles, who claimed descent from the earliest settlers (*luso descendentes*) had recently issued an official newspaper invoking Rousseau and stating that the "general wish" of the Portuguese people was invested in the Cortes which had ordained political change for the colony.³

Speakers at the Calcutta dinner took up related struggles for liberty. There were toasts to "the Marquess of Hastings [the outgoing Governor General] and the Liberty of the Indian press" and "les libérales of France". Later speeches lauded Jeremy Bentham, the Carbonari and the reform of the British parliament. Mr Patrick, an Irishman, raised his glass to Colonel James Young, the radical head of the agency house Alexander and Co., who was soon to return to Britain. A friend of Rammohan, Young later worked closely with Jeremy Bentham and Daniel O'Connell for the reform of Parliament and the Company's monopoly. Finally, "Ypsilanti and the Greeks" were remembered. Alexander Ypsilanti, a former Tsarist officer, had just invaded Ottoman Moldavia. The Greek merchants of the Indian cities awaited the liberation of their country. Greece was also on the mind of Young Bengal. In the Hindoo College, Calcutta, the young Eurasian poet and democrat Henry Derozio wrote on the heroic struggles of the Greeks through the ages and the equal greatness of ancient India.⁴ The distant connection between Greece and India was soon to be demonstrated anew in the career of Leicester Stanhope, a follower of Bentham, who agitated for the freedom of the Indian press and went on to found patriotic newspapers across Greece.⁵

This surge of support for a wide range of constitutional liberal reforms in India, Britain, Iberia, Greece and Latin America explains why Bishop Reginald

³ *Bombay Courier*, 19 January 1822, citing *Goa Gazette* of December.

⁴ Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, *Poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, a Forgotten Anglo-Indian Poet, Introduced by F. B. Bradley-Birt with a New Foreword by R. K. Dasgupta* (Calcutta, 1980; first published 1929); see also the forthcoming edition of Derozio's works edited and introduced by Rosinka Chaudhuri.

⁵ L. Stanhope, *Sketch of the History and Influence of the Press in British India* (London, 1823); F. Rosen, *Bentham, Byron and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism and Early Liberal Political Thought* (Oxford, 1992), 144–5.

Heber described the small Bengali intelligentsia as “advanced Whigs” when he came to India a few years later. Overwhelmed by the return of reactionary governments throughout the world after 1815, liberals and radicals depicted despotisms, from the Bourbons to the Ottomans and the Tsars, as an international unholy alliance against the people. The directors of the East India Company were a willing component of this junta according to British and other European liberals and free-traders in the East. They deplored the Company’s monopoly, high taxation and constant frontier wars. Any successful rebellion against autocracy across the world was therefore a cause for rejoicing in Calcutta. The Portuguese celebration was not unique. Rammohan Roy himself hosted several celebrations in Calcutta Town Hall for the Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American revolutions between 1820 and 1823. At a less heady time, on the fall of Neapolitan republic in 1821, Rammohan was so distressed that he was unable to visit his British radical friend, Buckingham.⁶

India’s dawning interest in European concepts of freedom and constitutional government was reciprocated. When Spanish reformers reissued the original 1812 Cadiz constitution, it was dedicated as follows: “Al liberalismo del noble, sabio, y virtuoso Brahma Ram-Mohan Roy”.⁷ The Swiss political economist J. de Sismondi, writing later in the Paris *Revue encyclopédique*, remarked that reports of Rammohan’s presence at events such as this clearly disproved the stereotype, purveyed by British colonialists, that India was doomed to social stagnation by caste prejudices against social mixing. What we see in this liberal constitutionalist moment, then, was the emergence of a small international public sphere—including Indians—that was unified not so much by coherent intellectual influence, but by political affect. This global imagining of constitutional liberty was made possible by the great expansion of the press and the idea of association at world level since the 1780s. Political theorists now fashioned their arguments against the background of displays of ritual emotion that purported to represent the people.

This essay seeks to provide a transnational context for the political ideas of Rammohan and other early Indian liberals. Roy became an iconic figure to Indians and Britons very early on. Born into a Brahmin Mughal service family, he moved through an early phase of personal religious enquiry and become closely associated with a number of British scholar officials and Unitarian ministers in Bengal. He learnt several European languages and, by 1815, had become spokesman for a religious tendency in Hinduism (Vedantaśāstra) that rejected

⁶ B. Majumdar, *History of Political thought from Rammohun to Dayananda (1821–84)*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1934), 22.

⁷ Sophia D. Collet, Plate VIA, in *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli (Calcutta, 1962).

“idol worship” and asserted that true Hinduism was monotheistic and little concerned with issues of caste. He founded the Atmiya Sabha (Friendly Society) and later the Brahmo Samaj (Society for the Supreme Being). His opposition to the burning of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyres, *sati*, a relatively uncommon but ideologically charged practice, earned him the enmity of the neo-orthodox in Bengal. His insistence that modern Hinduism was a corrupt form of a pure and monotheistic ancient religion caused his mother to disown him and his relations to try to disinherit him. But the crusade against corrupt practices, especially widow-burning, led him to publish numerous pamphlets in English, Bengali and Sanskrit and to found the subcontinent’s earliest Indian-run newspapers.

In turn, what Rammohan and his British liberal friends took to be a reactionary and “Tory” turn in Indian government after the departure of Lord Hastings in 1818 drew him into sustained political comment on the policies of the East India Company and the British government, including its foreign policy in relation to Iberia, France and Greece. Indo-Islamic India had long had its moralists and its public critiques of authority, but the international range of Rammohan’s imagined political community made him, in effect, India’s first indigenous “public man”. He argued for restricted European colonization of India and for free trade to end the East India Company’s monopoly. He went to Europe in 1832, visiting England at the time of the Reform bills and France after the revolution of 1830. He died in Bristol in 1833 when he was contemplating taking ship for the United States, at the behest of his Bostonian Unitarian friends.

This essay broadly accepts Bruce Robertson’s argument that the core of Rammohan’s political philosophy was the ideal of the virtuous householder striving for spiritual liberation (*mukti*) in this world according to the tradition of Vedanta.⁸ Rammohan’s version of enlightenment embraced Hindu, Muslim and Western notions of virtue. Yet though he undoubtedly contributed to their development, he was really neither a prophet of contemporary Indian secularism nor a modern cosmopolitan. In his English and Bengali writings he emerges very much as an exponent of a specific form of constitutional liberalism that flourished in the 1810s and 1820s.

Rammohan’s reading of European debates about constitutional government informed his construction of India’s past and its future. In 1822, at the height of the liberal euphoria over the Spanish and Portuguese revolutions, he published “Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the

⁸ See, for an important recent study, B. C. Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi, 1995).

Hindu Law of Inheritance”.⁹ This tract aimed to show that it was the corrupt and defective understanding of Bengal’s Dayabhaga laws of inheritance that resulted in the practice of widow-burning, the abolition of which had become his major public project. Fully Benthamite in the sense that it argued that bad laws make a bad society, Rammohan’s interpretation was much more historicist and concerned with education than were the later utilitarians’ harder positions. He wished to explain that India had once had a constitution and it was the decline of this constitution and its checks and balances that had sunk India into backwardness. Yet, equally, he implied that if the Indian mind had once managed to conceive the notion of constitutional balance and the separation of powers, it would one day do so again.

The narrative went like this. Deep in the Indian past, the “second tribe”, the Rajput or warrior caste, had established despotic rule as a reaction to internal warfare. “Arbitrary and despotic practices” of all sorts, including the oppression of women, had resulted. In time the other castes, under a great leader, Parasurama, had revolted and defeated “the royalists and put cruelly to death almost all the males of that tribe”.¹⁰ Thereafter, Rammohan said, a kind of division of powers existed. The Brahmins had “legislative authority”, while the “second tribe should exercise the executive authority”. After this, India enjoyed peace and harmony for many centuries. Then, unfortunately, “an absolute form of government gradually came again to prevail”. Brahmins abandoned their legislative role and began to take offices “in the political department”, becoming dependent on the Rajput and later Maratha rulers. This despotism allowed the Muslims to invade India from the twelfth century, “destroying temples, universities and all other sacred and literary establishments”. The British might well establish “quiet and happiness”. But the auguries were not good. In many respects, the East India Company had perpetuated despotism, allowing the consolidation of executive and judicial powers in the office of the revenue collector and his corrupt post-Mughal deputies.

Rammohan’s picture of the evolution of the Indian constitution represented a melding of *itihasa*, divine legend, with a particular, “Hindu”, view of medieval history. This was novel, though it built on an Indian tradition of interpreting and historicizing family and clan histories (*vamshavalis*) as much as on the work of European orientalist. At the broadest level, liberal historicizing, whether about Anglo-Saxon England, ancient Athens, Rome or India, represented an appeal to history and civilization that circumvented the legitimacy of present despotisms. This was of the utmost importance in a racially charged colonial situation where

⁹ Rammohan, “Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females”, in *The Essential Writings of Raja Rammohan Ray*, ed. B. C. Robertson (Delhi, 1999), 147–55.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 147–8, note 1.

Indians in general and Bengalis in particular were denounced as backward. In referring to “royalists”, the return of despotism and popular rebellion, Rammohan was locating Indian history within the wider realm of international constitutional liberalism. Yet Parasurama, the leader of the legendary rebellion of the Shastras, is a complex figure for Hindus. He was a matricide and murdered his Rajput enemies’ families. Violent rebellion necessarily involves impious acts and problems of ends and means. At first sight, Parasurama is an analogue of Oliver Cromwell. The Lord Protector was himself in a limbo status in British historiography at this time, represented not only as a regicide, but also as a just rebel.¹¹ Yet Rammohan’s imaginary history is in reality closer to the one being invoked by his Portuguese and Spanish friends in the same year when the tract on women’s rights was published. Like Indians, Iberians had to reach far into the classical past to find a constitution that pre-dated centuries of royal autocracy, fixing on classical figures such as Brutus and Cato as their constitutional heroes. Brutus, like Parasurama the matricide, was a morally dubious as well as a heroic figure. One critical aspect of Rammohan’s vision of an Indian constitution, however, was that it depended on Indian agency. Earlier British constructs of a “Hindoo constitution” gave a much more static picture of Indian history: it was the British who would re-establish ancient India’s “constitution”.

How did India’s ancient constitution relate to its present travails? To begin with, Rammohan’s own vision of political progress was international. Reform and nation-building in India depended on the success of constitutional revolutions throughout the world. Following setbacks in Iberia and Latin America, he was delighted by the overthrow of the Bourbons in France and visited Louis-Philippe several times during his final European trip of 1832 and 1833. When first denied entry to France by the London consulate, he raged against artificial barriers placed between nations and proposed an Anglo-French congress.¹² Above all, Rammohan argued tirelessly for the reform of Parliament. He watched the passage of the Reform Bill with trepidation, stating in 1832 that if it failed in Parliament he would sever all ties with Britain. Nevertheless, he appears to have hoped that a liberal rule in Westminster would reduce the power of the Company to that of a territorial government. Parliament would oversee Indian legislation more closely and divide judicial from executive powers across the subcontinent. Separate cadres of Indian judges and local executive officers would strengthen and eventually replace the European civil service, which would itself increasingly work in Indian languages.

11 Blair Worden, “The Victorians and Oliver Cromwell”, in S. Collini, R. Whatmore and B. Young, eds., *British Intellectual History 1750–1950. History, Religion and Culture* (Cambridge, 2000), 112–35.

12 Rammohan to Talleyrand, 1832, in *Essential Writings*, 280–83.

This concern with the separation of powers and local agency marked Rammohan out more as a disciple of Montesquieu than of Bentham. It is at this point in his argument, however, that we see his ideal constitution becoming actualized in contemporary political prescription. Parliament would, at least for the time being, assume the role of the Brahmin legislators and the Company that of the Rajput protectors. Rammohan was advocating a “mixed constitution”, as described by Hume, in which learned and aristocratic governance would be complemented by a limited popular check.

Thus at this stage Rammohan did not advocate the establishment of a representative government or council in India itself, as did a few British radicals, notably Robert Rickards,¹³ and the younger generation of Bengalis educated at the Hindoo College. Rammohan was as sceptical as Bentham of the concept of natural rights, including a natural right to self-rule. Instead, he hoped that the Imperial Parliament would act as the legislative guardian of India and other dependencies. He also supported the idea, promoted by some British politicians of both parties, including Bentham, that representatives of India and the colonies should sit in the reformed Parliament, turning it into something more like the French Assembly or the forum demanded by American colonists before 1776. This system would replace the corrupt East India and West India interests which had marred the unreformed Parliament.¹⁴ Yet Rammohan also feared a “colonial form of government” in which a British minister might become overwhelmingly powerful in Indian affairs. Someone who knew him well later remarked that he distrusted the “subservience” of Parliament to ministers. Here Rammohan perhaps had in mind what he knew of the causes of the American Revolution. Better would be “a limited government presenting a variety of checks on any abuse of its powers”.¹⁵

Rammohan tended to use the word “separation” to envision the eventual end of direct British rule in India, as did the liberal Governor General, Lord Hastings. He apparently believed that this would only happen some long time in the future. Yet resident British radicals as well as some Indians were already using the word “independence”. This was as early as 1832. The *Colombo Journal* wrote deprecating this talk. The *Bengal Hurkaru* responded that though distant in time, the education and improvement of Indians would ensure that “some

¹³ Robert Rickards, MP, *India, or Facts Submitted to Illustrate the Character and Condition of the Native Inhabitants*, 2 vols. (London, 1829), 2: 32.

¹⁴ Miles Taylor, “Empire and Parliamentary Reform: The 1832 Reform Act Revisited”, in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds., *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge 2003), 295–312; cf. Zastoupil, “Defining Christians, making Britons”, *Victorian Studies*, 44 (2002), 215–45.

¹⁵ “Ram Mohun Roy”, *Asiatic Journal*, NS, 12 (1834), 212.

moment will occur favourable to independence”.¹⁶ A mutually damaging independence was more likely to happen if the Company continued to grind the Indian peasant into the soil. Meanwhile, an Indian author argued that uncontrolled “colonisation” might have the same effect as it had had in Ireland. Clearly, what David Armitage has called the “contagion of sovereignty” had rapidly spread to India in the minds of a few intellectuals at least.¹⁷ The presence of American merchants and Calcutta’s connection with American Unitarians is important here.¹⁸ The Iberian and Latin American examples were perhaps even more instructive. At this time what some appear to have envisioned was a free “creole” empire of India, ruled by a small number of resident British expatriates along with mixed-race people and educated indigenes. This imaginary construction of India was similar to contemporary Brazil. Others, however, pondered an independent princely union of India under the crown¹⁹ or an indigenous ascendancy of propertied and liberal aristocrats based on the Bengal *zamindars* (landholders).

Since Rammohan advocated neither direct local political representation nor the early separation of India, it is difficult to see him as the first nationalist, as some historians did in the early twentieth century. Yet he can perhaps be described as a colonial patriot,²⁰ someone who conceived of India as a cultural and geographical unity. He increasingly came to refer to India, rather than Hindustan, as “a nation” and argued that from the cultural and moral perspective Indians, or “Asiatics” more generally, were the equals of Europeans. At other times, he used the word Hinduism (*Hindur* in Bengali), both positively and negatively, and he was one of the first Indians to do this.²¹ Contemporaries were aware of this. Disappointed Unitarians believed that he had opted for “Hindu Unitarianism” rather than Christian Unitarianism in 1818 because of his “patriotism”. Since he held that all religions have an equal claim to authority, custom and a sense of solidarity would define a “national cult” and consequently a nation.²² To that extent, he was once again closer to Edmund Burke than to later British liberals such as J. S. Mill, who left little room for a sense of

¹⁶ “Coomen” to *Bengal Hurkaru*, 21 November 1832.

¹⁷ David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

¹⁸ Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response* (Boston, MA, 1984).

¹⁹ Norbert Peabody reminds me that Col. James Tod argued for independent princely states in Rajasthan.

²⁰ Cf. C. A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1996).

²¹ D. H. Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993), 61–2.

²² Killingley, *Rammohun Roy*, 53.

nationality, as Uday Mehta has noted.²³ Later the Calcutta Tory newspaper, *John Bull* ridiculed Rammohan's embassy to England on behalf of the Mughal emperor as unnatural since the emperor was a Muslim. Rammohan's veiled threats that Muslim India would revolt if maltreated were suggested, the paper went on, by "a species of patriotism which likely enough owes its birth to the 'March of Intellect School.'"²⁴ Tories often branded their ideological opponents with Condorcet's phrase, which they tried to associate with radical innovation and atheism.

At the broadest level, Rammohan was attempting to build an Indian "public" or civil society from the ground up, so that within a generation Indians would begin to share in power and legislative authority. Where possible, like his European liberal peers, he sought to reduce and tame the despotic power of the Company, even if this meant an accession of authority to the distant sovereignty of the Westminster parliament. This stands out even more sharply in two cases where Rammohan was more radical: juries and the press. For him, the element of popular balance in his mixed constitution depended on the proper working of these institutions and, once again, their antecedents in the Indian past had to be envisioned.

The issue of juries emerged in the 1820s as a domestic British imperial problem, that of the press as an international liberal cause. To constitutionalist thinkers in Britain from Blackstone to J. S. Mill the jury was at the heart of the constitution, more important in some senses than parliamentary representation itself.²⁵ The 1825 Juries Act gave jurymen the power to judge points of law as well as of fact. But contemporary British ideologies of cultural difference clashed with the need for the sense of the community. At this time Indians were still debarred from selection for grand juries on the grounds that, being non-Christians, they were incapable of taking a meaningful oath. Nor, it was said, would they send their own people for punishment, particularly if they were Brahmins. More open critics, such as James Mill, argued that Indians were morally depraved as a race by long eras of despotism. But this struck at the heart of the evangelical case that the "Hindoo mind" was capable of moral reform and regeneration and would later be converted to Christianity. There was also a practical problem since Indian merchants, who underpinned much of the credit of Asian trade, were excluded from being jurors on critical cases involving commercial interests. Being born in

²³ Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

²⁴ *John Bull in the East*, 27 November 1832, "Selections from the Calcutta Press 1826–33", *Bengal Past and Present*, 26 (1923), 50.

²⁵ J. S. Cockburn and Thomas A. Green, eds., *Twelve Good Men and True: The Criminal Trial Jury in England 1200–1800* (Princeton, NJ, 1988).

India, even Eurasian Christians were barred from service with the result that itinerant sailors, petty European merchants and hangers-on of the East India Company were compelled into jury service. Eurasians and British liberals opposed to the Company fully supported a change. Several developments across the British Empire in the 1820s brought the issue to a head. Indians, Chinese and Malays had recently been given jury rights in Stamford Raffles's model settlement of Singapore. The same had been the case in the crown colony of Ceylon where native Christians, Buddhists and a few Hindus now sat on grand juries. More striking, freed slaves and local Africans could be jurymen in Sierra Leone.

Rammohan and his group, along with his learned Madras and Bombay contemporaries, argued strongly for a change in the Indian regulations to permit their countrymen to serve. The argument was, first, that respectable Indians were morally fully capable of taking oaths and that Hindu religion abominated lying. Second, an ancient system of jury, the *panchayat* (literally, a body of five men) had always existed in India. Finally, by taking part in judgment, Hindus and Muslims would be contributing their essential local knowledge to the proceedings, while at the same time learning to participate in a growing civil society. Concurrently, Ram Raz, a judge in the princely state of Mysore, was among the first Indians to designate the judicial tribunal the foundation of Indian political philosophy. In a letter of 1828 he traced an analogy of the *panchayat* to the ancient Hindu law books, where it was called the *sabha*.²⁶ Ram Raz went on to argue that the judgment of the *sabha* was absolute and the king merely executed its will. The *sabha* could be a multi-caste body and operated both in civil and criminal cases. The system had not died out in antiquity, but persisted into the present. Ram Raz stated that he had been a “native judge” in the princely state of Mysore:

I am personally acquainted with several instances in which the faujdar [the military governor] of Bangalore, an officer who as his name implies, must originally have belonged to the army . . . summoned an assembly called the panchayet, composed of all classes of people indiscriminately to attend at his kacchari [court] for the purposes of deciding civil causes.²⁷

It is significant that since the British defeat of Mysore's ruler in 1799 there had been continuous debate about the “ancient Hindoo constitution of Mysore”. Various corporate bodies within the state, including the royal house, Maratha Brahmin administrators and the Lingayat merchants, had played a part in practically defining its future workings and the limitation of British power

²⁶ Ram Raz, “On the Introduction of Trial by Jury”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1836), 244–57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 252–3.

within it.²⁸ Ram Raz began the process of theorizing and historicizing Mysore's institutions. Here and in his work on Hindu architecture²⁹ he vigorously assaulted British misrepresentations of Indian civilization, especially by the unnamed James Mill. It was Ram Raz's term *panchayat* that was taken up by writers in north India to describe local judicial agency. This was one of the first all-India symbols of cultural autonomy and later entered the nationalist canon in the works of Gandhi. *Panchayati Raj*—local government by *panchayat*—became an important institution of Nehru's India.

Parliament eventually conceded Indian participation in grand juries in principle by the East India Juries Act of 1828. But a long battle with the directors over the interpretation of the act ensued. The jury issue was one of the first of a series of conflicts between Indian liberals and the ruling power about Indian representation that continued until 1947. In every one of these disputes, Indian spokesmen tried to play on cleavages within British opinion that arose from domestic political argument.

The third British context for the emergence of Indian liberalism in addition to the constitution and the jury was the issue of press freedom. Free communication was an essential dimension of the liberal theory of civil society, as important as free trade and, like free trade, regarded as a moral as well as an economic imperative. Ferguson, Stewart and Bentham were all cited in India as champions of the role of the press as a foundation of free societies. In some respects, indeed, the Indian debate on the press went beyond the standard British Whig and liberal arguments precisely because the subcontinent remained an autocracy. The development of newspapers would in the eyes of Rammohan and his British confrères actually create a civil society and open up government to scrutiny.

The key figure here was James Silk Buckingham. He appears as co-proprietor with Rammohan of the *Calcutta Journal*, a short-lived radical journal which both printed translations of articles in Rammohan's indigenous newspapers and supplied material to them. Buckingham was a classic figure of the reforming era.³⁰ Born in Falmouth, Cornwall, he belonged to the mercantile, nonconformist and seafaring world that so consistently supported parliamentary reform. As a seaman on the Atlantic run, he had strong American connections and sympathies and later travelled widely in the USA. In the east, however, he encountered the full force of British despotism as he saw it, in the East India Company and its Levantine agencies. Deported from and returning to India, he took up a series of

²⁸ For the Mysore background see Nigel Chancellor, "Mysore: The Making and Unmaking of a Model State c.1799–1834", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2003.

²⁹ Ram Raz, *An Essay on the Architecture of the Hindus* (London, 1834).

³⁰ Ralph Turner, *James Silk Buckingham 1786–1855: A Social Biography* (London, 1934).

radical issues in the *Calcutta Journal*. These included parliamentary reform, temperance, anti-slavery (he claimed that the Company was running a clandestine slave trade) and improvement of the conditions of British and Indian seamen, the so-called “lascars”.

Buckingham was transported from India by Lord Amherst in 1823 after he had offended its officials once too often. His deputy editor, Sandford Arnot, later followed him under restraint. The Indian government had brought in full press censorship and several Indian-language newspapers closed down rather than pay compulsory sureties.³¹ The measure was not repealed until Charles Metcalfe became Governor General in 1835. In the meantime, Buckingham mounted a ferocious campaign against the directors of the East India Company in Britain, suing them for lost income and arbitrary arrest. He agitated in the Company’s Court of Proprietors, a body that had long been a popular forum. He toured the major provincial commercial cities involved in the reform movement, such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester. The liberal establishment led by Hume, Grey and Russell took up the cause and sponsored a bill in Parliament against the Company on his behalf. All the while, he edited in England the *Oriental Herald*, which carried on the work of the *Calcutta Journal* of supporting Indian reform and sponsoring the name of Rammohan Roy.

The first generation of Indian newspaper editors and public men adapted many of their ideas from Buckingham’s publications. In defence of liberty of the press, for instance, a correspondent of the *Calcutta Journal* (or possibly an editor under a pseudonym) deployed the classic liberal argument, attributed in this case to Blackstone:

Any laws, that is restraints imposed upon the actions of men, not absolutely required for the benefit of society are tyrannical Civil liberty, therefore, is the right of doing all things not prohibited by just and necessary laws. From this it appears that any unnecessary restraints on civil liberty or civil rights are unjustifiable.³²

This is the doctrine of liberalism as a negative value as described by Raymond Geuss.³³ At the same time, however, the early liberals, British and Indian, also had the more positive goal of diffusing reason and information through society and improving the workings of government by creating a reading public. According to the Indians, the press, like the jury and the constitution itself, had indigenous antecedents. These were the news writers (*akhbar naviss*) of Mughal India who informed officials of infractions of justice and upheld the rule of law.

³¹ Anon. (Buckingham). *Statement of Facts Relative to the Removal from India of Mr Buckingham* (Calcutta, 1828).

³² “Marcus” to *Calcutta Journal*, 21 October 1822.

³³ R. Geuss, “Liberalism and its Discontents”, *Political Theory*, 3 (June 2002), 320–39.

Rammohan's Bengali newspaper, the *Sambad Kaumudy* (Moon of Intelligence), functioned as just such a newssheet (*akhbarat*), bringing details of events such as the fate of the liberal constitutions of Europe but at the same time pointing to acts of official oppression across north India.

The issue of press freedom came to a head initially when John Adam, the Marquess of Hastings's successor as Governor General, imposed press censorship in response to Buckingham's publications. The *Calcutta Journal* had drawn attention to the fact that the Revd James Bryce, a Church of Scotland minister and editor of the "Tory" newspaper *John Bull*, was a placeman of the Company. He had become secretary to the Calcutta stationery department. The radicals indicted the Company for corrupting public opinion by using patronage to support a journal that promulgated the "Tory" line and persistently derogated from the "rights of freeborn Englishmen" in India. The rhetoric of press freedom struck an international tone. Censorship under the Bourbon autocracy in France was "less severe than what is considered law in India" and summary banishment had been "deprecated recently even in the despotic capital of Turkey".³⁴

It is difficult to believe, however, that Buckingham's and Arnot's close connection with Rammohan and the increasingly assertive Indian public men of Calcutta was not another cause for the disproportionate official response to this "insult" to government. The "delicacy" of the British position in India in regard to indigenous opinion had often been mentioned as a reason for a strong executive. Shortly before the *John Bull* issue there had been two examples of this assertiveness. *John Bull* had complained that Rammohan's Persian newspaper, the *Mirat al-Akhbar*, had used the word *tursa* (Christian) to describe Europeans in India.³⁵ Though he denied in the pages of the *Calcutta Journal* that the word was derogatory, it nevertheless conveyed a sense of religious error and low status to its readers. The honour of the "ruling race" was at issue here.

Both the *Akhbar* and the *Journal* had taken up the issue of the contemporary famine in the west and south of Ireland, an event that followed shortly after serious agrarian disturbances in Munster. Subscriptions for the Irish poor collected by Calcutta's European inhabitants had allegedly raised little money. "Native inhabitants" demonstrated their superior charity by subscribing much more. To drive home the point about the responsibility and generosity of the Indian public, the *Mirat al-Akhbar* published an article on "Ireland: The Causes of its Distress and Discontents".³⁶ Ireland, the article said, had been fighting off the unjust rule of the kings of England for a thousand years. Its peasants were

³⁴ *Calcutta Journal*, 1 July 1822.

³⁵ *John Bull*, 28 August 1822; "John Bull's last gasp", *Calcutta Journal*, 3 September 1822.

³⁶ Excerpt from *Mirat ul-Akhbar*, *Calcutta Journal*, 16 October 1822.

impoverished, yet non-resident Anglo-Irish landlords remitted huge sums of cash regularly to England. Rammohan had carefully followed the rise of O'Connell's movement. It is again difficult to believe that this articulate concern with Ireland was not, and was not perceived to be, a veiled attack on the Company's rule in India. One of Rammohan's arguments for the colonization of India by select bodies of Europeans was precisely that an analogous flow of money back to Britain from India would be inhibited if more respectable Europeans actually lived in the country. Here, indeed, we may see one of the earliest expressions of an argument which was to become central to the ideology of Indian nationalism: the idea of the "drain of wealth" from India, later elaborated by the Bombay nationalist leader and liberal MP Dadhabhai Naoroji.

Indians and British liberals put up fierce opposition to arbitrary deportation of editors and formal press censorship. Government recourse to trial for libel was adequate to protect public order in India, they asserted. British governments of the period frequently resorted to libel trials in the King's Bench court to punish radical sedition or insults to the crown. Rammohan's argument worked at two levels. First, at a practical level, he argued that a free press was essential in the discovery of arbitrary acts by figures in authority; it had in effect, a representative aspect. Again, an Indian public could only come into existence through the expansion of public knowledge and the press was an organ of education. At a second level, Rammohan and his followers argued that the notion that press freedom would lead to Indian unrest was a fiction. India's polite and commercial society had already demonstrated its implicit loyalty to the British connection through massive investments of wealth in property and businesses around Calcutta and in East India Company and British bonds and financial instruments.³⁷ This was a significant reflection on the fact that British imperialism in India was built almost entirely on Indian, not British, capital. It also represented an Indian version of the early liberal theory that the national debt, rather than being a sign of the corruption of power, as in France, was in fact a sign of trust between state and civil society.

CONCLUSION

Rammohan Roy has conventionally been termed "the father of modern India". But that paternity is clearly a complex phenomenon. Most of his contemporaries regarded him as a pseudo-Christian or even an outcaste. Many younger people, grouped around Derozio, regarded him as too conservative on the matter of civic "rights" and representation. Even some of his British contemporaries endorsed Indian local self-government more vigorously than did he. The Brahmo

³⁷ Appeal to the King in Council, 1823, in *Raja Ram Mohun Roy: His Life, Speeches and Writings* (Madras, c. 1920), 39.

Samaj which he founded became in time a somewhat inverted, caste-like religion of the Bengali intelligentsia. Yet he was both an original thinker and an inspiration to later generations. He produced the first identifiable “canon” of modern Indian political thought. He was the first Indian to represent the growth of freedom in India as an essential part of a wider transnational quest of humanity for self-realization. The Brahmo Samaj, moreover, had a much wider influence on both Indian liberalism and conservatism than its limited number of supporters would suggest. The dominant strand of Indian political ideology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was neither Gandhian “neighbourliness” nor neo-Hindu revival, but liberal, secular, republican progressivism, represented by figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Jawaharlal Nehru and today’s Indian democratic left. Rammohan Roy’s arguments were constantly reappropriated and reconstituted by thinkers and politicians of this temper.

This essay, however, has been concerned not so much an individual or a “tradition”, but with a distinct “moment” in the history of Indian ideas. What is so striking about the press and political publications in Calcutta, and to a lesser extent Bombay and Madras, in the first three decades of the nineteenth century is how many of the key themes of modern Indian thought—national and international, radical and, indeed, neo-conservative—were already in circulation in articulate form. Before 1830 British and Indian radical journals were discussing India’s “independence” or “separation”, the evils or advantages of “colonisation”, the “drain of wealth” from India, and the need for balance between central power and local agency in a future constitution. Early Indian liberals—though not Rammohan and his immediate circle—had already developed an anti-landlord rhetoric as vigorous as William Cobbett’s. They also debated the need for “local self-government”, though at this time through the jury and the *panchayat* system. Landlord associations had been founded to argue for the “rights” of property owners, while a neo-conservative ideology depicting India as a Hindu space in need of a protective national political economy had emerged simultaneously with this radical critique, and certainly before the appropriation in Bengal of the ideas of the German economic thinker Friedrich List. Every one of these themes was to disappear and resurface regularly in debates through to the later twentieth century.

Of course, modern political ideas of this sort emerged dramatically across the whole world in the aftermath of the American and European revolutions. And there was no simple teleology that linked this efflorescence of radicalism to the advent of democratic politics either in the West or in India. As late as 1907 the liberal Calcutta journal the *Modern Review* lamented that British publications were incapable of imagining Indian independence at the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas they had readily done so nearly a century before.³⁸ Again, it

³⁸ “Notes”, *Modern Review*, 1 (January–March 1907), 200.

was perhaps only a few hundred Indians who in 1825 fully understood the context of these slogans and doctrines. Some of them, like Rammohan, were alienated from their families and castes. Nevertheless, thousands of other Indians responded to the power of these ideas in less articulate ways and they became ever more influential as the century progressed. Thus the fecundity of the production of political theory in India at this time needs some explanation. The diffusion of radical themes from Europe to India was undoubtedly important. All of Rammohan's major political arguments related directly to British and European debates on equivalent issues. This was the period before the Reform Act of 1832 when domestic British politics was violently contentious and radicals were acutely aware of the European and American dimensions of constitutional liberalism. Reformers regarded the ascendant press not merely as a medium of communication, but as an embodiment of the process by which diffusion of useful and moral sentiments would ultimately create a liberated, transnational civil society.

British radical doctrines concerning education, civic responsibility and constitutional empowerment, however, found appropriate "ecological niches" in India at this time because of the particular conditions that prevailed in the subcontinent. Indian spokesmen displayed great virtuosity in reconstructing and relocating these arguments within their own traditions that they were beginning to historicize. Events in Goa and the French settlements dramatized the European movement for constitutional government. The radical attack on the Company drew Indians' attention to the contradictions and injustices of "distant sovereignty", thus creating a pervasive crisis of legitimacy for the Company's rule. The prospect of a political appeal to the "freedom-loving British Nation" beyond the purview of the Company was novel and alluring. The supreme courts of the presidencies, and beyond them, the Privy Council, seemed to offer a more immediate check on local executive power, dramatizing a doctrine of division of powers distantly glimpsed in the writings of Montesquieu and his followers. Indians had been flooding to the supreme courts since the 1770s and had become habituated to the language of legal conflicts about rights, property and the powers of the state. Out of this emerged India's constitutional liberal "moment" of the 1810s and 1820s.

CONTESTING TRANSLATIONS: ORIENTALISM AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *VEDAS**

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This essay examines the contested grounds of authorization for one important orientalist project in India during the nineteenth century – the translation of the ancient Sanskrit Rg Veda, with a view to highlighting the ultimately ambiguous nature of the orientalist enterprise. It is argued that Europeans initially sought to validate their translations by adhering to Indian scholarly practices and, in later decades, to a more “scientific” orientalist–philological practice. Indian Sanskrit scholars, however, rather than accepting such translations of the Veda, and the cultural characterizations they contained, instead engaged critically with them, reproducing a distinctive vision of Indian civilization through their own translations into English. Moreover, by examining the diverse ways in which key concepts, such as the “fidelity” of a translation, were negotiated by Europeans and Indians, this essay also suggests that intellectual histories of the colonial encounter in South Asia should move beyond debates about colonial knowledge to more explicitly examine the contexts of knowledgeable practices.

It has often been argued that British orientalist research in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served to consolidate and authorize the rule of the colonial state, and contributed to an emerging European-authored narrative of global history. While it is now evident that orientalism served principally to construct forms of European power,¹ it is often unrecognized that orientalist scholarship in India drew much of its authority from the cultural standing and intellectual expertise of the “traditional” guardians of Sanskrit-

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¹ For example, E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); and B. S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

based knowledge, the *brāhmaṇ paṇḍits* (“learned men”). For example, in late eighteenth-century Bengal, orientalist such as William Jones distinguished the superior “accuracy” of their scholarship from earlier published works by reference to their Sanskrit skills, but especially to their newly gained ability to conduct a “confidential intercourse with learned Brahmens”.² Thus, in a significant manner, orientalism can be read as a set of “double” practices in India, as Europeans attempted to utilize and redirect forms of Indian cultural expertise and social authority to their own colonial projects, while also attempting to displace that authority in the process. But, importantly, orientalism’s dependence upon forms of Indian scholarship also allows us to understand these practices as not simply conducive to the empowerment of the colonial state, but as simultaneously providing opportunities for learned intermediaries—and Indian Sanskrit scholars more generally—to forge their own competing visions of Indian society and history within the emerging public sphere, thereby making important contributions to early formulations of anti-colonial modernity and Hindu national identity. It is with this aspect of orientalism that this essay is ultimately concerned.³

This essay is composed of two principal sections. The first concerns what might be labelled the “grounds of authorization” for one important orientalist project: the translation of the *R̥g Veda*. It does so with a view to understanding the evolving ways in which Europeans sought to validate their scholarship: initially by reference to their adherence to Indian scholarly practices, and then, increasingly, to a “scientific” orientalist-philological practice. The second section deals with the critical engagements of a number of Indian Sanskrit scholars with the findings of European orientalism on the subject of the *Vedas*, and explores the potential cultural significance these engagements could be used to create. It is also argued that, in an important sense, such engagements (and critiques) were produced out of the very terms of orientalist practice, especially within India’s educational institutions. Lastly, it is suggested that by examining the diverse ways in which key concepts, such as the “fidelity” of a translation, were negotiated by Europeans and Indians, intellectual histories of the colonial encounter in South Asia should be able to move beyond tired debates about “colonial knowledge” (as representative of either colonial power or intercultural “dialogue”),⁴ to incorporate more explicitly elements of the social and cultural contexts within which knowledgeable practices were undertaken.

² W. Jones, “The Tenth Anniversary Discourse, delivered 28 February 1793, by the President, on Asiatic History, Civil and Natural”, *Asiatick Researches*, 4 (1795), 9.

³ This argument is elaborated in the introduction to M. S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770–1880* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴ See W. Pinch, “Same Difference in India and Europe”, *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History*, 38, 3 (1999), 389–407.

I

The *Ṛg Veda* is the earliest and arguably most important portion of the four *Vedas*. Compiled from 1500 to 1200 BCE, the *Ṛg Veda* is generally thought to incorporate a series of liturgical verses, intended to be recited during sacrificial ritual, and which in earlier millennia would have been utilized to assuage a series of naturalistic deities. The *Vedas*, as a whole, form the core textual constituent of Hinduism, and for more than a hundred generations before the nineteenth century had been the sole preserve of *brāhmaṇs*, Hinduism's highest caste, due to their inherent sanctity. The *Vedas* were considered by nineteenth-century Europeans to be key documents for understanding not only the nature of ancient Indian society, but also contemporary India, given their prominent status within Hindu religious practice. As F. Max Müller noted in 1859, "it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging of Indian religion, morals, and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age".⁵ The first systematic attempt to render the *Ṛg Veda* into English was undertaken by H. H. Wilson (1786–1860), the first Boden Professor of Sanskrit in Oxford.⁶ In 1854 Wilson identified the difficulties he faced in preparing his translation, arguing, in essence, that these could be traced either to the grammatical differences between Vedic Sanskrit and English, or to the vagueness inherent to the language of the *Ṛg Veda* itself. Indeed, Vedic Sanskrit is a much earlier form of the language most commonly used in the *śāstra* (the corpus of Hindu religious texts), the grammar of which was codified around the fifth century BCE by Pāṇini in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Vedic Sanskrit is distinguished from "classical" Sanskrit, for example, by the presence of pitch accents, the use of the subjunctive, and twelve different infinitive usages. In particular, Wilson pointed to the frequent use of compound constructions in the text which were awkward to translate into English; the common use of adjectives such as *vipra* ("wise" or "learned") without substantives, resulting in some ambiguity as to whether they were indeed adjectives or nouns (i.e. "a sage"); as well as difficulties in distinguishing whether some words should be rendered as epithets or names. *Jātavedas*, for example, is sometimes used as a name, at other times as an epithet of the god Agni. Moreover, the epithet had been subjected to wildly different explanations within subsequent commentarial literature— "he by whom knowledge was acquired by birth", "he by whom all that has been born is known", "he by whom all wealth is generated"

⁵ F. Max Müller, *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, so Far as It Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1859), 9.

⁶ There were several attempts at *Veda* translations before Wilson's, however, though all were either incomplete or in a non-English language. These included the 1842 English translation of the *Sāma Veda* by Revd Stevenson (which included some verses from the *Ṛg Veda*), a French translation of the *Ṛg Veda* begun in 1848 by S. A. Langlois, and T. Benfey's German translation of the *Sāma Veda* in the same year.

and so on—lending further uncertainty to the exact translation.⁷ In recent European translations of parts of the *Veda* corpus (by Stevenson, Langlois, and Benfey), even the seemingly simple word *bhūmi* had been rendered variously as “earth”, “supplies”, and “food”.⁸

Wilson felt confident, however, in his ability to overcome what he called these “slight obstacles” to a correct translation, citing his own command of Sanskrit, obtained from his long service in India.⁹ His strategy for translation boiled down, in essence, to producing a rendering which conformed as closely as possible to the commentary most revered by Indians themselves, that of Sāyaṇa. This fourteenth-century commentary was produced largely by reference to the principles of the much older tradition of *nirvacanaśāstra*, the science for determining, and maintaining, meaning within the *Vedas*, the key text of which is Yāska’s *Nirukta* (dating perhaps to the fourth century BCE).¹⁰ Wilson “faithfully” followed Sāyaṇa’s commentary as he felt that it represented the “safest guide through the intricacies and obscurities of the text”, though he also sometimes struck out on his own in those difficult passages where Sāyaṇa was thought to have “failed to remove all uncertainty”.¹¹ The important point for Wilson, however, was that while Sāyaṇa might have resorted to conjecture in instances where the meaning of a word was unclear (or indeed when a key word was missing entirely), the conjecture of a European should always be deemed to be of inferior authority (even if “more rational”) to that of Sāyaṇa, as “it is not that which has been accepted for centuries by critics of indisputable learning in their own departments of knowledge”.¹² Sāyaṇa was, in short, considered by Wilson still to be the most “competent interpreter” of the *Ṛg Veda*.¹³

In many ways, Wilson’s approach to translating the *Ṛg Veda* was informed by his long residence in India, the manner in which he had learned Sanskrit and its literature, and the relationships which he had forged with Indian Sanskrit scholars. Wilson had arrived in India on the Company’s medical service, but soon began to learn Sanskrit with the assistance of the *paṇḍits*, producing, for example, an early translation of Kālidāsa’s great Sanskrit poem *Meghadūta* (The Cloud Messenger) in 1814. In 1811 Wilson was appointed secretary to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, and in 1823 became the secretary to the government’s

⁷ H. H. Wilson, transl., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita. A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns, Constituting the Second Ashtaka, or Book, of the Rig-Veda* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1854), xx–xxi.

⁸ Ibid., xxvi–xxix.

⁹ Ibid., xxii.

¹⁰ E. G. Kahrs, *Indian Semantic Analysis: The Nirvacana Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 27–8, 32–3.

¹¹ Wilson, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita . . . Second Ashtaka*, xviii.

¹² Ibid., xxiii.

¹³ Ibid., xxix.

General Committee of Public Instruction, where he was a leading advocate for the promotion of Sanskrit education in India.¹⁴ Wilson viewed the cultivation of Sanskrit, in India especially, to be of “intrinsic value”, not only as a point of antiquarian interest to Europeans, but as a means to improve Indian society upon its own terms, through a renewal of its textual-cultural heritage.¹⁵ The government promotion of Sanskrit scholarship (both European and Indian), therefore, he regarded as capable of being directed towards the enhancement of Indians’ understanding of the content of their own literature, as well as a being a means of reinvigorating the Indian vernacular languages, which were conceived to be wholly dependent upon Sanskrit for their power of expression.¹⁶

Wilson wrote sparingly about his relationships with Indian scholars, but clearly valued them at least partly for their usefulness in validating his own scholarship. The time he spent working at Benares Sanskrit College in 1819 and 1820 was cited in his application to become Boden Professor, on the grounds that “the eminent pandits of that city . . . afforded [him] valuable opportunities of improving [his] knowledge of Sanscrit”.¹⁷ In this respect, Wilson learned Sanskrit, and forged his strategy for translating its literature, within the context of orientalist practices in India which remained largely dependent upon Indian Sanskrit scholars, despite repeated attempts to “institutionalize” the language and its literature.¹⁸ Europeans relied upon the *paṇḍits* to gain access to Sanskrit manuscripts and to explain the cultural meaningfulness of Sanskrit literature, as well as to naturalize orientalist research into the Indian socio-cultural context. Wilson’s 1819 Sanskrit–English dictionary, for example, the first dictionary of its kind, had been enlarged from a compilation made by a number of *paṇḍits* employed in the Company’s college at Fort William in Calcutta, and overseen by Raghumani Bhaṭṭācārya.¹⁹ Wilson viewed it as an improvement on the lists of

¹⁴ See also Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, chap. 3; and O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past, 1784–1838* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 118–61.

¹⁵ See, for example, enclosure to letter, H. H. Wilson to H. Mackenzie, dated 17 July 1821, British Library, OIOC, Bengal Revenue Consultations, P/59/1, No. 26 (21 August 1821).

¹⁶ H. H. Wilson, “Education of the Natives of India”, *Asiatic Journal*, NS, 19, 73 (1836), reprinted in L. Zastoupil & M. Moir, eds., *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist–Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 221.

¹⁷ Letter of H. H. Wilson, dated 28 May 1831, reprinted in “The Boden Professorship of Sanscrit at Oxford”, *Asiatic Journal*, NS, 7, 27 (1832), 242.

¹⁸ Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India*, chap. 2; cf. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*.

¹⁹ H. H. Wilson, *A Dictionary, Sanscrit and English: Translated, Amended and Enlarged, from an Original Compilation Prepared by Learned Natives for the College of Fort William* (Calcutta: Hindostanee Press, 1819), i.

vocabulary (*kośa*) often used in India, such as the *Amarakośa*, translated by H. T. Colebrooke in 1808 (not least because of Wilson's decision to use alphabetization), as well as on the very complex, and often "erroneous", original compilation of Bhaṭṭācārya.²⁰ Indeed, Wilson explicitly noted that one could place "little dependence" upon "native research", unless it was "sedulously and unremittingly controuled".²¹ Yet Wilson also clearly understood his dictionary to be a literary production which had been formulated within the norms of established Indian scholarly tradition. For example, he ensured that the dictionary was composed from Indian *kośas*, rather than from the vocabulary of "the classical compositions of the best *Hindu* writers", as the former were the "received authorities of all India", and they were "perpetually cited in the ablest commentaries".²² He also identified the grammatical and etymological features of words according to the "generally cultivated method of Panini".²³ In essence, Wilson felt that his dictionary simply displayed "all the information we possess at present of those writers [of the *kośas*], who are celebrated as lexicographers by the *Hindus*".²⁴

Nevertheless, Wilson's strategy for translating and interpreting Sanskrit generally, and the *Vedas* in particular, increasingly came to be disputed within the European orientalist establishment. On the continent, orientalists working within the philological tradition forged by Franz Bopp had little patience for accepting analyses of Sanskrit on the authority of Indian sources. Thus the first volume of the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, a multi-volume Sanskrit–German dictionary, compiled by Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolph Roth, and published from 1855²⁵, acknowledged the debt which European Sanskritists owed to Wilson's labours, but could not concur in Wilson's invariable reference to Indian authority: "But we regret that he [Wilson] chose to persist with this practice, i.e. that of the Indian scholars, in the dictionary as well as in the grammar [Wilson's Sanskrit grammar of 1841], rather than embark on the route required by European scholarship."²⁶ Wilson's dictionary had been a product of its time, they stated, and the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch* aimed to surpass it by reference to modern European philology.

²⁰ Ibid., i–iii.

²¹ Ibid., iii.

²² Ibid., iv.

²³ Ibid., xxiv.

²⁴ Ibid., v.

²⁵ *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, herausgegeben von der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, bearbeitet von Otto Böhtlingk und Rudolph Roth, Vol. 1 (St Petersburg, 1855).

²⁶ Ibid., iii. "wir . . . bedauern aber, dass er es vorgezogen hat, beim Wörterbuch wie bei der Grammatik auf dem Standpunkte der indischen Gelehrten zu verharren, statt den von der europäischen Wissenschaft geforderten Weg zu betreten".

With regard to the translation of terms found in the *Vedas*, Böhtlingk and Roth argued that while Indian commentarial literature had proved to be an excellent guide to the decipherment of later *Brāhmaṇa* theological literature (which sought to explain the *Vedas*), the distinctive, very early character of the *Vedas* and their language rendered that literature unsuitable guides to rely upon uncritically. The authors of such commentaries, they noted, lacked “a freedom of judgment and a greater breadth of view and of historical intuitions”.²⁷ In essence, Böhtlingk and Roth argued that later Indian commentators would likely have read the *Vedas* as necessarily being in accordance with their own belief systems, given that they did not recognize a historical development in the tenets and practices of Brahmanical religion over the centuries. Orientalists, they noted, working within the tradition of comparative philology, were thus ultimately responsible for the task of deciphering the *Vedas* according to “the sense which the [original] poets themselves have put into their hymns and utterances”.²⁸ Therefore, in addition to moving beyond a dependence upon the Indian *kośas*, B. öhtlingk and Roth stated that in the preparation of their dictionary, they had followed the “tedious” and “laborious” practice of correlating all the occurrences of a particular word within the *Vedas*, as this was a superior way of establishing its meaning, especially in comparison to a reliance upon etymology alone. Indeed, they noted that no Indian commentator or European translator had yet undertaken such a task.²⁹

While some Europeans, like Theodor Goldstücker, Professor of Sanskrit at University College London, continued to defend the value of Indian commentaries for interpreting the *Vedas*,³⁰ others, such as John Muir, argued in 1866 that no one interpretative strategy could be adequate to solve the problems inherent in understanding the *Ṛg Veda*. In a lengthy comparison of the varying interpretations of difficult Vedic words given by Yāska and Sāyaṇa, and contemporary Europeans, Muir pointed out that Yāska and Sāyaṇa often gave conflicting interpretations of words and provided a range of possible meanings for some words on etymological grounds, indicating that they likely did not know a word’s actual signification, and that Sāyaṇa, especially, was inconsistent in his renderings. As such, Muir argued that Indian commentators should not be relied upon uncritically, but only in cases where there was further philological evidence to substantiate their understandings. Muir advocated, therefore, a translational practice which did not “stand still” at the point where Sāyaṇa ended, but one

²⁷ Cited and translated by J. Muir in “On the Interpretation of the Veda”. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, NS, 2 (1866), 308.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ T. Goldstücker. *Panini: His Place in Sanskrit Literature* (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1861), esp. 248.

which advanced further, to “improve upon his lessons . . . rejecting a good deal that [is] learned from him, as erroneous”.³¹

It was F. Max Müller (1823–1900), however, Wilson’s co-labourer in Oxford, and editor of the Sanskrit text of the *Ṛg Veda* with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, who most clearly articulated the reformist, philological agenda of Böhtlingk and Roth in the interpretation of the *Vedas*. Max Müller evidently felt that Sāyaṇa gave the “traditional” interpretation of Vedic hymns, rather than their “original sense”, and argued in 1856 that the authors of the *Brāhmaṇas* were “blinded by theology”, while Yāska (author of the *Nirukta*) was “deceived by etymological fictions”.³² A decade later, Max Müller published what he considered to be a definitive pronouncement upon the merits of the varying strategies for translating the *Ṛg Veda*, by comparing translations of a series of verses, one produced according to the commentary of Sāyaṇa, the other utilizing the principles of modern philology and European orientalist expertise.³³ The problems Max Müller identified with a translation based upon Sāyaṇa’s commentary ranged from his reliance upon “tradition” to grammatical errors, misapprehensions of the pitch accent, and so forth.

In one verse, *Ṛg* x, 57, 6, Max Müller argued that in the phrase “*vr̥ate tava manas tanūṣu bibhrataḥ*”, *bhr̥* (“to bear”) with *manas* (“mind”) should not mean to “keep one’s mind on something”, as Sāyaṇa suggested, but rather, departing from the now commonly accepted understanding of *manas* as “mind”, as “to keep [*bhr̥*] the soul [*manas*] in our bodies [*tanūṣu*]”.³⁴ Again, *Ṛg*, x, 59, 6 had been translated by Max Müller according to the dictates of Sāyaṇa in the following manner:

O life-leading goddess, give to us (to Subandhu) again the eye, again here to us breath, and pleasure! May we long see the rising sun! O Anumati, pity us, hail!

The “improved” orientalist translation, in comparison, reads:

Thou guide of life, bestow again upon us sight, again breath, here to enjoy. May we long see the rising sun! O (increasing) Moon, be gracious to us with mercy!

The principal point of revision here is how one should render the term *anumati*. Max Müller understood *anumati* as “compliance, grace”, and Sāyaṇa’s commentary invoked the meaning of goddess, or a personification of grace. Yet *anumati* also refers to a phase of the moon, and Max Müller argued that

³¹ Muir, “On the Interpretation of the Veda”, 397–401.

³² F. Max Müller, ed., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, the Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans; together with the Commentary of Sayanacharya*, Vol. 3, (London: W. H. Allen, 1856), vii–ix.

³³ F. Max Müller, “The Hymns of the Gaupanyanas and the Legend of King Asamati”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, NS, 2, (1866), 426–79.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 449, 454, 458.

translating the term by reference to “moon” was here more appropriate, given that “in a prayer for life”, such as this verse is thought to represent, “the moon would naturally come in for an invocation”.³⁵

The following year, in June 1867, Max Müller published an advertisement in the Benares-based journal *The Pandit* inviting Indian subscriptions to an edition of his own, more comprehensive, English translation of the *Ṛg Veda*.³⁶ While he noted in this prospectus that Sāyaṇa’s commentary, the *Nirukta*, and the *Brāhmaṇas* were all important guides to deciphering the *Vedas*, he also planned to utilize the philological practices of comparison of word occurrences, etymological analysis, and consultation of cognate languages, in order to produce a fuller, more accurate translation. Such a strategy was controversial, Max Müller conceded, but ultimately he felt, echoing John Muir, that “it is the duty of every scholar never to allow himself to be guided by tradition, unless, that tradition has first been submitted to the same critical tests which are applied to the suggestions of his own private judgment”.³⁷ Max Müller’s prospectus met with a number of direct responses from Indians living in Benares, including one in Sanskrit by Śiva Prasād, a government inspector for public instruction in northern India.³⁸ Such confrontations of European orientalist initiatives are largely missing from discussions of the broader context of the debate over *Veda* translation in Europe, as are the further number of critiques of orientalist translation practices which were articulated in India in a variety of other fora. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century the portrayal of ancient Indian culture presented within such orientalist translations—that is, of the *Vedas* as representative of a “primitive religion” dominated by sacrificial ritual and a mythology of deities which personified natural phenomena—was ultimately contested, in a wide variety of media, on the grounds of Indians’ intrinsic ability to produce superior translation–interpretations. This is the subject of the final section of this essay.

II

While European orientalists disputed the appropriate methodology to utilize in translating, or, to use Max Müller’s term, “deciphering”, the *Ṛg Veda*, it was seemingly taken for granted that Europeans had the right, and even the duty, to do so. Wilson hoped that his orientalist works would form part of a European

³⁵ Ibid., 450, 460.

³⁶ F. Max Müller, “Prospectus of the Rig-Veda Translation”, *The Pandit*, 2, 13 (June 1867), 21–2. Only one volume was eventually published: F. Max Müller, transl., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita, The Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans, Translated and Explained. Vol. 1, Hymns to the Maruts or the Storm Gods* (London: Trübner & Co., 1869).

³⁷ Max Müller, “Prospectus of the Rig-Veda Translation”.

³⁸ Śiva Prasād, “*Mokṣamūlarakṛta-ṛgvedānuvādaḥ*” [“the translation of the *Ṛg Veda* made by Max Müller”], *The Pandit*, 4, 41 (October 1869), 110–14.

revival of Sanskrit literature on behalf of Indians, for example, and Max Müller justified the translation of the *Vedas* on the grounds that it would enhance Europeans' understanding of their own ancient Aryan heritage. In other words, the highly sacred status of the *Vedas* was conventionally redirected to European cultural and political agendas, even as the conditions of a "correct" translation were contested. Yet Indians also engaged critically with the findings and methodologies of this orientalist research, in effect claiming a distinct, and therefore authoritative, ground for speaking on behalf of the Indian cultural-textual past. Indian disputes with the findings of orientalist research were very often centred on the issue of the translation, as well as the cultural translatability, of Sanskrit texts. Importantly, such disputations were commonly articulated by those most closely associated with the colonial institutions of orientalist research—Indians working as translators and teachers in the educational service, for example. The Sanskrit scholarship of college *paṇḍits*, as well as a number of other emerging learned groups, became during the course of the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s a very public activity in cities such as Benares, and one which held important ramifications for the elaboration of Sanskrit's place within a nationalized Hindu identity.

One of the most vocal critics of European orientalism who engaged explicitly in the critique of European representations of Hindu religious doctrine and history was Pramadādāsa Mittra (fl. 1860s–1880s), a member of a prominent Bengali merchant family in Benares. Mittra had attained an admirable command of Sanskrit and English, and became assistant Anglo-Sanskrit professor in the Benares College in the early 1860s.³⁹ There Mittra principally taught students English through the medium of Sanskrit.⁴⁰ He also worked closely with the Europeans of the college, including the principal R. T. H. Griffith (a former student of H. H. Wilson at Oxford), and A. E. Gough, the Anglo-Sanskrit professor. Both men assisted Mittra in the task of revising and completing the English translation begun by the former college principal, J. R. Ballantyne, of the Sanskrit *Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, a difficult text on rhetoric.⁴¹ Mittra's views on the respective roles of Indians and Europeans in Sanskrit scholarship and education, however, clearly challenged the expectations of Europeans.

³⁹ Griffith had described Bābū Pramadādāsa Mittra as "a scholar of this college as eminently fitted for the post by his knowledge and love of Sanskrit and English literature". See R. Griffith to M. Kempson, dated 4 June 1862. Uttar Pradesh Regional Archive (Allahabad), Files of the Director of Education, SL 12, File 420, No. 62 of 1862.

⁴⁰ M. Kempson, *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces, for the year 1865–66* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1866), 7.

⁴¹ Pramadādāsa Mittra, transl., *The Mirror of Composition, A Treatise on Poetical Criticism, Being an English Translation of the Sāhitya Darpaṇa of Viśwanātha Kavirāja* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1875), "Preface".

This was highlighted most clearly in 1884, as the reorganization (and revival) of the Anglo-Sanskrit Department of Benares College was being contemplated. Its then-principal, George Thibaut, desired to “improve” the study of Sanskrit in India by reference to the techniques of modern European orientalism, and in particular its use of philology and critical manuscript editing. In a memorandum on the proposed re-establishment of Anglo-Sanskrit, he argued that such a change would convert the institution’s students and “old school” *paṇḍits* into what he called “accomplished Sanskrit scholars, in the European sense of the word”. Indeed, Thibaut was particularly concerned that the college’s dozen or so *paṇḍits*, who acted as its principal teachers (although under European superintendence), could not be said to possess a “critical” knowledge of Sanskrit and its literature, being largely ignorant of its historical character. He thus pointedly recommended a course of instruction whereby all Sanskrit students would be exposed to English-language orientalist texts, such as John Muir’s *Sanskrit Texts* (1858), Max Müller’s *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (1859), and the essays of the celebrated orientalist H. T. Colebrooke. This, Thibaut thought, would be the best way to enable Indian students, and the *paṇḍits*, “to form wider and more enlightened views of Indian literature, history, and antiquities”.⁴² For Thibaut, orientalist research had surpassed the traditional Sanskrit scholarship of the *paṇḍits*, and he clearly felt that authority on the objects of orientalism—Indian history and Sanskrit literature—now rested in the higher educational institutions of Europe.

Pramadādāsa Mitra, who had by 1884 retired from the college, was indignant when he learned of Thibaut’s memo, feeling that it contained more than a trace of “envy” at the knowledge of the *paṇḍits*. Mitra argued in a response to government that even the “most confident and learned European Sanskritist will not deny that he has yet to learn a good deal about the numerous philosophical systems of India”. In more sophisticated forms of Sanskrit scholarship, he noted, European orientalists were still dependent upon the expertise of *paṇḍits* of “the true Indian type”. In any case, Mitra thought that Sanskrit scholarship in Benares was not yet in such a pitiable state as to require the *paṇḍits* to resort to European orientalist works in order to gain a correct knowledge of their own religion and philosophy.⁴³ Thibaut’s immediate response to this letter was to criticize Mitra as being overly partial to traditional Indian knowledge, as well as being essentially

⁴² G. Thibaut, “Memorandum on the Proposed Re-establishment of an Anglo-Sanskrit Department in the Benares College”, dated 25 March 1884. Uttar Pradesh State Archive (Lucknow), Education Block, Box 4, SL17, File 35, No. 2.

⁴³ Bābū Pramadādāsa Mitra to Director of Public Instruction, NWP, dated 2 April 1884. Uttar Pradesh State Archive (Lucknow), Education Dept, Box 4, SL17, File 35, No. 3.

contemptuous of European Sanskritists, which he most certainly was.⁴⁴ Yet it was equally Mitra's long-standing position at Benares College which had both fed that contempt and facilitated his critique of European orientalism, by virtue of his access to a wide range of resources, including the forum of the college's journal, *The Pandit*, to which he was a regular contributor.

Once again, the issue of translation was to be a particularly high-profile site for the disputation of orientalist authority, and in this regard Pramadādāsa Mitra had a long and distinguished record. For example, in reviewing the Sanskrit dictionary of Theodor Goldstücker, professor of Sanskrit at University College London, in an early issue of *The Pandit* (1866), Mitra had commended the author for the "arduousness of the task" being undertaken, although he sought also to provide corrections to Goldstücker's definitions of some of the technical terms in rhetoric (the *alaṅkāraśāstra*). Mitra argued, for instance, that the term *abhidhāna* did not mean "a word" (in the compound *anvitābhidhānavādinah* as Goldstücker supposed, but rather the "act of expressing". The compound, in effect, was intended to refer to "those who hold the expression of the logically connected", being a designation for followers of the philosophical school of *mīmāṃsā*. It was an important error, Mitra noted, because it distinguished them from followers of the *nyāya* on the basis of their very different understandings of the way in which meaning is constructed by the constituent parts of a sentence.⁴⁵

One of Mitra's more notable critiques, however, related to European speculations regarding the historical emergence of Sanskritic Aryanism in the subcontinent, and its relationship with India's "aboriginal" inhabitants, through a close reading of the *Vedas*.⁴⁶ In a letter of 1877, published in *The Pandit*, Mitra took particular issue with John Muir's view of the Vedic god Rudra, whom Muir had characterized as "originally a demon worshipped by the aborigines, as the lord of evil spirits and subsequently introduced into Aryan worship".⁴⁷ Mitra argued that Rudra was properly understood as "the immortal

⁴⁴ G. Thibaut to R. Griffith, Director of Public Instruction, NWP, dated 1 May 1884. Uttar Pradesh State Archive (Lucknow), Education Dept, Box 4, SL17, File 35, handwritten enclosure.

⁴⁵ Pramadādāsa Mitra, "Remarks on Goldstücker's Enlarged Edition of Wilson's Prof. Sanskrit Dictionary", *The Pandit*, 1, 1 (June 1866), 9–10. The difference being whether words convey meaning in the context of a sentence only, or through the recollection of the meanings of the individual words. See K. Kunjunni Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1963), 193–203.

⁴⁶ On this point see T. R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. 206–18.

⁴⁷ J. Muir, "Relations of the Priests to Other Classes of Indian Society in the Vedic Age", *The Pandit*, 2, 14 (July 1867), 45. This article had originally appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, NS, 2 (1866), 257–302.

and undecaying lord of life and death as well as immortality . . . the dispenser of healing medicines, the best of physicians and the father of the world". Such positive attributes had been explained away by Muir as mere "flattery", but Mittra, in turn, interpreted a series of Vedic authorities to demonstrate that Muir had not understood the nature of the "Aryan concept of the unity of the Being who variously manifests himself in the great powers of nature". For example, Mittra argued that Muir interpreted the ambiguous pronoun *saḥ* ("he") as referring to Rudra in a verse from the *Atharva Veda*, ("he is death, he is immortality, he is vastness . . ."), when in fact it was meant to refer to the "One God". This interpretation, Mittra noted, was apparent from the larger context of the whole hymn in which the verse was situated. Elsewhere, Muir had apparently confused parts of a verse's predicate with the subject, thus rendering Rudra the referent of *saḥ* (in the nominative case) rather than the singular deity.⁴⁸ Thus Muir had, in Mittra's opinion, interpreted Vedic mythology rather too literally, instead of as a naturalistic aspect of a single, supreme deity, due to his insufficient knowledge of the whole of Vedic text, as well as by carrying out a series of grammatical errors.

But the most ardent critic of European interpretations of the *Vedas* in the late nineteenth century was Guru Datta Vidyārthī (1864–90), leader of the "Gurukul" wing of the Hindu reformist organization, the Ārya Samāj. Like Pramadādāsa Mittra, Vidyārthī argued, in essence, that European orientalists such as John Muir, Max Müller, and Monier-Williams had wholly misinterpreted the *Vedas* in their translations, and had thereby misrepresented the nature of ancient Indian society. The founder of the Ārya Samāj, Dayānanda Sarasvatī, had from the 1860s been devoted to reinstating a "pure", "original", and "pristine" Hinduism based on the absolute primacy of the Vedic texts, through the purging from Hindu religious practice of later, i.e. *Purāṇik*, "corruptions" such as idol worship, the institutions of caste, and the prohibition of widow remarriage. In essence, the, Ārya Samāj was a modernizing movement within Hinduism which attempted to establish the *Vedas* as its sole canonical scripture.⁴⁹ An important component of the Ārya Samāj's agenda through the late nineteenth century, therefore, was to authoritatively establish the *Vedas* as a superior, philosophical, and even "scientific" body of knowledge when compared with either the Bible or the Koran.⁵⁰ As such, the European interpretation of the contents of the *Vedas* was deemed by Samājīs such as Vidyārthī to be unacceptable, given that it presented the content of these texts as composed primarily of a "primitive" mythology.

⁴⁸ Pramadādāsa Mittra, letter to the editor, *The Pandit*, NS, 1 (November 1876), 382–6.

⁴⁹ On the Ārya Samāj see, for example, K. W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

⁵⁰ See G. Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

Dayānanda Sarasvatī had criticized the *Veda* translations of European orientalists on several occasions, including one in which he accused Max Müller of being largely ignorant of Vedic Sanskrit,⁵¹ but it was Guru Datta Vidyārthī who spelled out the full rationale for rejecting these translation–interpretations, often utilizing the very terms of European orientalist debates over Vedic translation. Vidyārthī had attended the Government College in Lahore, and in the early 1880s was appointed professor of science in that same institution.⁵² In an essay entitled “The Terminology of the Vedas and European Scholars”, published in his own *Vedic Magazine* in 1889, Vidyārthī claimed that European orientalists were blind to the true meaning of the *Vedas* for a number of reasons. At the outset, Vidyārthī argued that in order to fully understand the *Vedas*—indeed, to produce a “rational interpretation” of them—one must first be “a complete master” of all branches of Sanskrit knowledge, including the “science of morals”, grammar, *yoga*, and *vedānta*. European orientalists such as Max Müller quite simply lacked such full training—a training, one can assume, which was available only in India. In addition, orientalists most often laboured under a strong Christian prejudice, which eliminated them as “impartial” students of the *Vedas*. The propagation of such misunderstandings had caused untold damage to Indian understandings of the *Vedas*, Vidyārthī also argued, as English-educated Indians with little knowledge of Sanskrit often took orientalist interpretations at face value.⁵³ He therefore set out to establish what he considered to be the accurate interpretation of the *Vedas* by reference to the ancient Sanskrit science of determining meaning within the *Vedas*, the *nirvacanaśāstra*.

Vidyārthī explained that the *Nirukta* of Yāska, the principal text of the *nirvacanaśāstra*, unequivocally stated that all Vedic terms are *yaugika*; that is, they retain the meaning ascribed to them by virtue of their etymological structure. Signification in the *Vedas* was, therefore, derived from the basic meaning of the verbal root, together with any modifying prefixes or suffixes.⁵⁴ European orientalists, he argued, had singularly failed to appreciate this point, instead interpreting many words as *laukika* or *rūḍhi* (with reference to its ordinary, worldly meaning). By abandoning the tenets of Sanskrit grammatical analysis, and interpreting the *Vedas* in their translations according to common usage, Vidyārthī noted that orientalists had “flooded their interpretations of the Vedas

⁵¹ Dayānanda Sarasvatī, *Saṭyarth Prakāś*, cited in Guru Datta Vidyārthī, “The Terminology of the Vedas and European Scholars”, in Svāmī Vedānanda Tīrtha, ed., *Wisdom of the Rishis, or, Works of Pt. Gurudutta Vidyarthi, M.A.* (New Delhi: M D Reprints Corp., 1997), 27.

⁵² Biographical details can be found in Lala Lajpat Rai, *Pandit Guru Datta Vidyarthi, Life and Work*, ed. Ram Prakash (New Delhi: Arya Book Depot 2000; first published 1891).

⁵³ Guru Datta Vidyārthī, “The Terminology of the Vedas and European Scholars”, 28–37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–8.

with forged or borrowed tales of mythology, with stories and anecdotes of historic or pre-historic personages”.⁵⁵

At least part of this fundamental error Vidyārthī also attributed to a European preoccupation with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, which despite orientalist assertions to the contrary, he felt had been produced largely without a proper understanding of the analytical techniques of the *Nirukta*.⁵⁶ Sāyaṇa’s commentary, he noted (echoing Böhtlingk and Roth), was deeply flawed by virtue of the fact that it reflected only “popular prejudice” at the time of its writing. As such, he argued that all the terms in his commentary were understood in their *laukika* (worldly) sense.⁵⁷ Indeed, that the “true” meaning of the *Vedas* had long been lost by the time of Sāyaṇa’s mythologically based interpretations of the texts was reflective of the general principle of degeneration in religious knowledge; just as religious practice “designed to meet certain real wants” inevitably degenerates into meaningless ritual, Vidyārthī argued, the high philosophy of the *Vedas* was lost over time to a dominant mythological, *Purāṇik* age, in which a “pantheism” reigned supreme.⁵⁸ In this way Vidyārthī also implied that it was orientalist themselves who, by virtue of the fact that many consulted Sāyaṇa, must have lacked a sufficient historical consciousness to understand the development (or degeneration) of Sanskrit intellectual production.

In “Terminology of the Vedas”, Vidyārthī was not only making an authority claim by reference to his specifically Indian knowledge of the *nirvacanaśāstra*. By sanctioning the abandonment of any reference to the customary or traditionally accepted meanings of words through commentaries such as that of Sāyaṇa, and by recommending in its place a revisiting of the etymological method of the *Nirukta* (and other, related texts), he was in effect also unleashing the substantial semantic possibilities afforded by the very structure of Sanskrit itself, and with it the possibility of rewriting the meaning of the *Vedas* through translation. The breadth of interpretation this strategy afforded can be seen in the following example, *Rg* i, 162, 2, which is most often understood as describing the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice). Max Müller’s version reads thus:

When they lead the horse, which is decked with pure gold ornaments, the offering [*rāti*], firmly grasped, the spotted goat [*aja*] bleats while walking onwards; it goes the path beloved by Indra and Pushan.

Vidyārthī, in contrast, rendered the same verse this way:

They who preach that only wealth earned by righteous means should be appropriated and spent, and those born in wisdom [*aja*], who are well-versed in questioning others

⁵⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁶ In fact, Yāska’s comments on the *Vedas* are invariably quoted and analysed by Sāyaṇa.

⁵⁷ Guru Datta Vidyārthī, “The Terminology of the Vedas and European Scholars”, 70–3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 46–7, 71.

elegantly, in the science of forms and in correcting the unwise, these and such alone drink the potion of strength and of power to govern.⁵⁹

Vidyārthī argued that Max Müller’s translation of *aja*, for example, as “goat” was *laukika*, for etymologically (or in its *yaukika* interpretation) it means “being never born again”, from the conjunction of *a* (a prefix of negation) and *ja* (from the verbal root *jan*, meaning “to be born”). From this basic meaning Vidyārthī went on to translate *aja* as “a man born in wisdom”. Similarly, Max Müller is said to understand *rāti* (from root *rā*, “to give”) as an “offering”, rather than the simple act of giving, in the process giving it a specifically contemporary religious inflection.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most striking example of Vidyārthī’s translational scheme, however, can be found in his attempt to show that some of the verses of the *Ṛg Veda* imparted a knowledge of modern chemistry. Indeed, he argued that the word *Ṛg* itself signified the “expression of the nature, properties, and actions and re-actions produced by substances”. The *Ṛg Veda*, therefore, was intended to be a compendium describing the “physical, chemical and active properties of all *material* substances”, in addition to the “psychological properties of all *mental* substances”.⁶¹ In this regard, the comparison of H. H. Wilson’s translation of *Ṛg* i, 2, 7 with that of Vidyārthī is notable:

I invoke Mitra, of pure vigour, and Varuna, the devourer of foes,—the joint accomplishers of the act bestowing water (on the earth). [H. H. Wilson]⁶²

Let one who is desirous to form water by the combination of two substances take pure hydrogen and gas highly heated, and, oxygen gas possessed of the property *rishadha*, and let him combine them to form water. [Vidyārthī]

Here *mitra* is rendered as “hydrogen” rather than its *laukika* meaning of “friend” or as a proper name, and in a similar manner *varuna* becomes “oxygen”. *Mitra* was described etymologically by Vidyārthī by reference to Pāṇini’s ancient grammar as meaning “one that measures, or stands as a standard of reference”, from root *mi* (or *mā*) “to measure”, with the instrumental suffix *tra*. This basic meaning is then interpreted as referring to “hydrogen” given that it is the lightest element known (i.e. the first of the elements), as well as being monovalent (and thus a standard of reference). Taking his cue from philological comparison, Vidyārthī further noted that *mitra* was often found to be synonymous in the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59–62.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁶¹ Guru Datta Vidyārthī, “Composition of Water”, in *Wisdom of the Rishis*, 98; original emphasis.

⁶² H. H. Wilson, transl., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita. A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns, Constituting the First Ashtaka, or Book, of the Rig-Veda*, 2nd edn (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1866), 7.

Vedas with *udāna*, one of the vital airs, which is “well characterised by its lightness or by its power to lift up”.

More difficult to account for etymologically was *varuṇa*, which does not appear in the grammar of Pāṇini. This term was described by Vidyārthī as being composed of the suffix *unan* (which is an *uṇādi* suffix),⁶³ together with the verbal root *vr*, which carries several distinct meanings (it is, in fact, two different roots). Interestingly, the Sanskrit commentary on *uṇādi* suffixes, the *Daśapādyuṇādivṛtti*, which deals specifically with the formation of *varuṇa*, identifies the root *vr* (in 5.52) as meaning “to cover” or “is covered”. Vidyārthī, however, made use of the alternative root, meaning “to choose”, or even “to like”, and so interpreted *varuṇa* as indicating “that which is acceptable to all or seeks all”. This, Vidyārthī argued, was a natural depiction of oxygen, given that all living beings require that element in order to live.⁶⁴

While Vidyārthī very often strained the signifying capability of Sanskrit’s verbal root–prefix–suffix structure, while also engaging in nearly wilful misreadings of the texts of Sanskrit grammar and Vedic exegesis, the etymological method he adapted clearly allowed him to attribute to the *Vedas* a wholly scientific character, which pointedly challenged European translations of these ancient texts as representative of a “primitive” religion. It is but the most colourful, and inventive, example of the diverse ways in which Indian Sanskrit scholars engaged with European translation–interpretations of Sanskrit texts. Additional research into the variety of forms this engagement took will serve to further demonstrate that European orientalist representations of “Hinduism” did not wholly displace other interrogations of the constitution of “Hindu tradition” during the nineteenth century, thereby renewing a sense of historical polyvocality and the presence of disputed “authenticities”. In addition, such research will also emphasize that the Indian engagement with orientalism upon distinctive—yet interconnected—intellectual and cultural grounds was also an implicitly political act, ultimately directed by India’s Sanskrit-speaking elites towards the elaboration of similarly complex visions of modernity.

⁶³ From the *Daśapādyuṇādivṛtti*, a commentary which deals with word formation outside the purview of Pāṇini’s grammar.

⁶⁴ Guru Datta Vidyārthī, “Composition of Water”, 100–1.

APOLOGETIC MODERNITY

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What is the conceptual status of modernity in the Muslim world? Scholars describe Muslim attempts at appropriating this European idea as being either derivative or incomplete, with a few calling for multiple modernities to allow modern Islam some autonomy. Such approaches are critical of the apologetic way in which Muslims have grappled with the idea of modernity, the purity and autonomy of the concept of which is apparently compromised by its derivative and incomplete appropriation. None have attended to the conceptual status of this apologetic itself, though it is certainly the most important element in Muslim debates on the modern. This essay considers the adoption of modernity as an idea among Muslim intellectuals in nineteenth-century India, a place in which some of the earliest and most influential debates on Islam's modernity occurred. It argues that Muslim apologetics created a modernity whose rejection of purity and autonomy permitted it a distinctive conceptual form.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Muslims have been deeply concerned with the idea of modernity and its place in Islamic thought. In the Muslim world the term modernity itself was taken from languages like English, French or German and translated into some version of two Arabic roots describing the contemporary and the novel, for instance the abstract nouns contemporaneity (*asriyyat*) and novelty (*jadidiyyat*), both nineteenth-century neologisms. These words still retain the memory of their translation, so that Muslim debates on the modern continue to occur within narrative spaces bounded by markers like East and West, Islam and Christianity.

Was this language of modernity wholly or partially foreign? Was it a sign of Christian or European dominance? Was there anything neutral, universal or Islamic about the modern? It was questions of these kinds that characterized Muslim debates on modernity, with markers like the East and West or Islam and Christianity, which in European thought tended to define the boundaries of the modern in a peripheral and merely descriptive way, becoming conceptually central in the Muslim world and historically grounded in imperialism. As a result Muslim debates over modernity generally took the form of defining a relationship, whether of acceptance, rejection or compromise, between East and West, Islam and

Christianity. The dictated character of this debate, however, made the emergence of a systematic modernism in control of its own terms of argument impossible, for Muslims were neither able to participate in European discussions about their modernity, nor to be acknowledged in them, even if these discussions formed the basis of their own sense of the modern. That is to say, the modernist debate among Muslims continued to revolve around historical oppositions that could not enter into any real, let alone systematic, relationship, so that relations between East and West, Muslim and Christian, were thought of in partial and fragmentary ways, like attempts to enter into conversation with someone speaking a different language. The closeness of its thinking to European thought, together with its inability to engage with and integrate the latter intellectually, made Muslim modernism essentially apologetic. And it is the partial and unsystematic nature of this apologetic modernity that I want to explore in the context of colonial India, if only to find in it something more than intellectual and political limitation. After all, the very weakness, incompleteness or derivative nature of Muslim apologetic needs to be explained in light of the manifest intelligence of its practitioners. Moreover, Islamic modernism provides the intellectual and political foundations for Muslim movements even today, which continue to rely upon its apologetic and unsystematic ways.

Scholars of modern Islam have all noticed its apologetic character but have spent little time attending to it. Most dismiss this tradition as being a sign merely of Islam's incomplete modernity and a product of the West's overwhelming might. Whether or not these scholars think Islam will survive the shock of this ever-renewed encounter with some sort of Euro-American modernity, they are united in seeing Muslim apologetic in negative terms as a lack and an absence whose positive alternative is naturally provided by the West. This is true even when the scholar concerned is a critic of European or American modernity who bemoans the passing of Islam's traditional world.¹ Indeed such sympathetic scholars despise Muslim modernism even more for sacrificing what they see as a glorious history to the requirements of an industrial age. But sometimes these scholars move beyond the sorry tale of Islam's incomplete modernity, and, sometimes inadvertently, provide its apologetic with the rudiments of ontology. A good example is the following sentence from Fazlur Rahman's book *Islam and Modernity*:

[Islamic] modernism could afford to be partial and unsystematic and could even afford to be slow—for at the theoretical level it was mostly a “defense of Islam” and hence chose to respond to those problems that the western critics had raised, while at the

¹ Among the most famous scholarly works on Islam's modernity are Hamilton Gibb's *Modern Trend in Islam* (1947) and Gustave von Grunebaum's *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (1964).

practical level the urgency for a speedy and systematic reform was often difficult to feel owing to the absence of ultimate and concrete responsibilities for problem solving.²

Rahman, himself a celebrated exponent of Islamic modernism, traces its origins to the period of European dominance in the nineteenth century and to the emergence throughout the Muslim world of efforts at grappling with the fact of Europe's intellectual and political hegemony. It is in this context, Rahman thinks, that these efforts coalesced in a movement he calls Islamic modernism, which he defines in terms of its partialities and unsystematic character: a movement consisting on the one hand in a defense of Muslim beliefs and practices against European criticism, and on the other in an attack on these same beliefs and practices in the terms of European criticism.

Rahman traces the origins of this interest in modernity to the questions that Europeans began to ask about Islam in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What, for instance, was the allegiance of Muslims to the Caliph residing in Constantinople? This was the earliest form of a Western concern with pan-Islamic loyalty. Under what conditions was *jihad* against Christian rulers incumbent upon Muslims? This was the earliest form of a Western concern with war as an Islamic obligation. As Rahman shows, such questions, which served to differentiate East from West, Islam from Christianity, were also taken up by nineteenth-century Muslim writers, who repudiated European theories about pan-Islamic or *jihad* politics and tried to reform Islam itself away from such injunctions in the name of modernity. But their sense of modernity was cobbled together out of disparate European ideals like civility, rationality and the like, without any attempt to develop a coherent theory of the modern. For Muslim ideas of Islam's modernity were neither independent nor systematic, but plotted according to European concerns, themselves partial in every sense of the word.

Instead of following a well-trodden path in bemoaning the derivative or incomplete character of this modernity, one that did not control the terms of its own debate, Rahman describes its apparent weakness as a luxury. In the period of colonial dominance, he claims, attempts to modernize Islam in the way of, say, reforming its canon law could afford to be partial and unsystematic because Muslims could not control or change the society in which they lived. Their interest in pan-Islamic or *jihad* politics was largely theoretical, so were their attempts to remake Muslim societies in modern terms. If their dependence on European categories of modernity made Muslim modernists partial, in Rahman's formulation, their inability to put into effect a project for Islam's modernization made them unsystematic as well. Taken together, both these factors added up to

² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 85.

a sense and practice of Muslim modernity that I am arguing was fundamentally apologetic in nature. But it is precisely this apologetic modernism, dismissed by others as mere weakness, which Fazlur Rahman describes as a luxury, holding that the circumstances of European domination afforded Muslims the opportunity to become modern partially, unsystematically and even slowly.

I shall return to what exactly the luxury of this apologetic might consist of, but I want to suggest here that the fragmentary nature of such thought also allowed its practitioners to be modern in curious and not-quite-European ways. In what follows I want to argue two points. In the first place I want to suggest that the very “weakness”, or what Rahman calls its luxurious character, allowed Muslims to think of modernity in intellectual rather than political terms, and that this in itself gave the advocates of modernity some degree of autonomy. Thus while the British in India, for example, thought that pan-Islamic loyalty or *jihad* posed questions that were as much political as anything else, Muslim modernists were able to regard them as essentially theoretical because they pertained to the workings of a world over which they exercised no political control. For modernist politics were fragmented, made up in equal measure of remnants from the precolonial past (like dealing with religious institutions but no longer civil ones) and cast-offs from the colonial present (like being appointed to minor administrative positions but having no say in the imperial order).

The second point I want to make is that this apologetic modernism was produced in the name of Islam as a new historical entity, designating a moral community transcending the particularity of royal, clerical or mystical authority. We know that it was only during the nineteenth century that the word Islam, of rare occurrence in the Quran and premodern Muslim texts in general, came to be used as a category of identity embracing all Muslim practices.³ Before this it had been used mostly to relate theological categories, such as obedience (*islam*) and faith (*iman*), to categories of Muslim identity such as religion (*din*), sect (*firqa*), school (*mazhab*) and mystical order (*tariqa*), to say nothing of the more or less profane identifications of royal authority. There was no idea of Islam as a totality of beliefs and actions that not only transcended the remit of specific authorities like those of clerics, mystics and kings, but could also become its own authority as an independent historical actor designating a new kind of moral community.

One might even say that “Islam” and the question of its modernity were born at the same time, insofar as this Islam emerges in modernist debates as a historical agent and authority in its own right, constituting the totality of Muslim beliefs

³ See for this Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 41–78.

and practices as a community with its own volition, ethos or spirit.⁴ But for Islam to have a spirit it needed to possess a body as well, and this was provided by its culture (*tahzib*) or civilization (*tamaddun*), within which all prior forms of Muslim identification were made to disappear. The cultural body of Islam, in other words, produced the spirit that governed it, whether this was conceived in the name of Montesquieu, Hegel or Feuerbach. While I shall not be dealing with the question of Islam's spirit in this essay, I do want to point out that in addition to spiriting Muslim authority away, it constituted a radically new locution. It would not have been possible to talk about the spirit of Islam before the nineteenth century, because Islam itself had not yet come to exist as a singular culture or civilization, the sum total of Muslim beliefs and practices.

By claiming that their weakness allowed for an intellectual rather than political approach to the question of modernity, I do not mean to say that Muslim modernists in colonial India had no community-building agenda, only that the lack of political responsibility permitted them a thoughtful reflection upon the notion of authority. And this was done in the universalistic terms of Islam as a new category of identification that ended up displacing particular authorities altogether. I want to claim that this reflection upon authority in the name of a new Islam went beyond the purely instrumental concerns of these modernists to constitute a specific way of thinking, one that has outlived them and that survives to this day.

THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK

India provides us with among the earliest and most influential traditions of Muslim modernism, exemplified from the middle of the nineteenth century by the Aligarh Movement. Named after the town in northern India that housed its most prominent institution, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, later Aligarh Muslim University, the Aligarh Movement was also primarily a north Indian phenomenon, but one whose influence extended much beyond the borders of India. This movement was founded following the abortive Indian Mutiny against British rule of 1857–8, and was led by a group of men who belonged to a class of professional or salaried gentry (*shurafa*) that had furnished administrators to precolonial states and now attempted to do the same for colonial India. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a minor aristocrat and official, was the founder and acknowledged leader of the Aligarh group, which called itself a party or school in English, and a movement or *tahrik* in Urdu, and whose important activities, the college apart, comprised the Muhammadan Educational Conference and

⁴ The exemplary text here is Sayyid Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (1873), itself derived from earlier works like Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Life of Mohammed* (1870).

voluminous writings, including a journal, the *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq* (Refinement of Morals).

The historiography describes Aligarhism as a reform movement, in this way stranding it semantically between the Protestant Reformation and the English Reform Bills, thus suggesting that it possessed the strengths of neither and the weaknesses of both. Since colonial times scholars have stressed the incomplete nature of Aligarhism, faltering between the categories of religious reform on the one hand and social reform on the other, and have presented the movement as a hybrid that achieved neither a complete religious reformation for Islam nor a complete social reform of it. For instance, Sir Sayyid's attempt to reform the Muslim religion is said to have achieved so little success that his famous rationalist commentary on the Quran, which repudiated its account of miracles and insisted that women were the equals of men, was too radical to be taught at the college he himself had founded, thus accomplishing neither a religious nor a social reformation of Islam. Aligarh's basic mission was therefore simply to inculcate English education and Victorian morals among the Muslim gentry in order to equip them for positions within the colonial bureaucracy. The Aligarhists also called what they did a reform, using for this both the English word and an Arabic term (*islah*) meaning something like "betterment", but they did so in a very different sense from the historiography. On the one hand they used the word reform in a polemical sense, implying by it the corruption of contemporary Islam, for which traditional authorities like the aristocracy (*umara*) and the clergy (*ulama*) were to be blamed. But on the other hand Aligarhists used reform in an apologetic sense, deliberately situated in the uncertain colonial zone between two proscribed passions: religion and politics. And in these two senses of the word, distanced from Reformation as much as from Reform Bill, we already see a meditation upon authority resulting from the luxury of modernism's weakness.

Let us look at an Aligarhist definition of the modern, in order to demonstrate, however briefly, the radical implications of its apologetic. The following passage, by Aligarh's founder, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, is taken from an essay on traditional and modern religious thought published in the journal *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq*:

By the ancient period [*zamana-e qadim*] we would like to mean our history [*zamana-e ma*] before the Prophet's advent. But since Muslims very quickly returned to that period and closed their eyes to the light of modern times [*zamana-e jadid*], we were forced to extend the ancient period into the thirteenth-hundredth year of the Prophet's advent.⁵

⁵ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Mazhabi khayal zamanah-e qadim awr zamanah-e jadid ka", in Muhammad Ismail Panipati, ed., *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid*, Vol. 3 (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-ye Adab, 1961), 23. This and all subsequent translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

This quotation provides us with a succinct example of what came to be the standard account of Islam's modernity, one whose apologetic reasoning is endlessly repeated to this day. It claims that modernity, defined in the usual loose terms as rationality, science and the like, emerged with Islam, was forgotten, and must now be rediscovered in Europe. This reasoning is apologetic because its concept of modernity is taken from European thought in a partial or unsystematic manner and read back to early Islam. But such anachronistic forms of justification, resulting entirely from the political weakness of a colonized population, also betray unsuspected depths, making for a novel history of the modern in Muslim India. For one thing the term modernity here is seen to emerge directly from Islam, thus passing by a European debate that would oppose or even reconcile these two. Islam, in other words, is coeval with modernity. What is more, the term as used by Sir Sayyid would deny its own opposition to the traditional. So of the two neologisms translating modernity, contemporaneity (*asriyyat*, more commonly *asr-e hazir*) and novelty (*jadidiyyat*), the Aligarhists tended to opt for the latter, whose meaning of newness was often conflated with the old theological word renovation (*tajdid*), derived from the same root and indicating religious renewal as a periodic phenomenon. A different history of newness, in other words, emerged from Aligarh's modernity, one whose relationship with vast areas of tradition can only be described as indifferent.

Such twists in the idea of the modern are hardly unique to the Aligarh Movement. Indeed Christian apologetics in Europe might well have approached modernity as idea and as event in similar ways. What made this colonial modernity different was the dominance it achieved among Muslim intellectuals, itself resulting, I would argue, from a certain luxury of thought that was inherent in their weakness, a luxury that Fazlur Rahman attributes to these men's inability to resolve the political problems facing Muslims in British India. So while studies of Aligarhism as a reform movement tend to concentrate on its instrumental or nation-building character, I intend to look also at the non-instrumental nature of its thought. For it is here, in the very helplessness of these men, that the movement's intellectual originality resides, as perhaps does its true legacy.⁶

⁶ Two biographies of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, one by a fellow modernist and the other by an English friend, set the tone by which the Aligarh Movement is dealt with in the historiography. The Urdu work, published in 1901 by Altaf Husayn Hali, emphasizes the religious and literary aspects of Sir Sayyid's reformation, while the English one, published in 1885 by Colonel G. F. I. Graham, focuses on his work as a social reformer. See Altaf Husayn Hali, *Hayat-i Javed* (Mirpur: Arsalan Books, 2000), and G. F. I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1974). Among the important studies of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh Movement are J. M. S. Baljon's *Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949), Christian Troll's *Sayyid Ahmad Khan:*

Let us pursue this originality, by way of illustration, in the passage from Sayyid Ahmad Khan quoted above. Summarized, it states that while modernity emerged with Islam, it was forgotten because Muslims retreated to the traditional world, only to rediscover this modernity in nineteenth-century Europe. What strikes one immediately is the fact that Sir Sayyid's history of Islam contains not one but two accounts of the beginning of modernity. What is more, in the first one—the rise of Islam—tradition follows upon modernity rather than the other way around. With its second coming—the rise of Europe—modernity certainly follows tradition, but in a curious way, since the latter becomes something deprived of any real presence. Sandwiched between two moments of modernity, tradition in this passage suggests only the inability of the modern to constitute a real universality, or rather a systematic totality binding together both Europe and Asia in a single unity—exactly the system of relations between conquerors and conquered that Muslim modernists could not achieve politically, and which was therefore shattered into oppositions like East and West, Islam and Christianity.

We are beginning to see that an apologetic thinking of this sort, despite its reputation for intellectual weakness, did possess some autonomy. I want to argue here that among the reasons for this autonomy is this apologetic's relation to its progenitor, in this case European thought. This relation is indirect and even parodying, because while Muslim apologetic lies very close to certain kinds of European thinking, it neither capitulates to the West nor establishes a dialogue with it. In the passage from Sir Sayyid cited above, it is clear that while the idea of the modern as a break with tradition is taken from Christian writers, as is its Western provenance and definition, the claim that Islam constituted the first of two moments of modernity is not only distinct, but also disengaged, from both the premises and the logic of a concept of the modern as something singular in nature. Indeed Sir Sayyid's claims for Islam's modernity are so disengaged from a European language of the modern that they could not be taken seriously by it, and in fact Muslim apologetic has never been engaged intellectually by the West.

A SPEECHLESS INTIMACY

It is a mistake to see Islamic modernism's relationship with European thinking in terms of a dialogue. There was certainly much trafficking with colonial narratives and categories, and of course there were attempts to have things understood by the colonial administration, but there was no intellectual dialogue. Indeed the more that English terms and models were employed by the Aligarhists

A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), and David Lelyveld's *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). The last is a fine institutional history of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University).

the less meaning they often possessed. In 1870, for instance, Sir Sayyid wrote in England and published, in English, his book *Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto*. This work was written to refute Sir William Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, and it would be easy to think of it as the very model of intellectual dialogue. Yet even a cursory glance at Sir Sayyid's volume is enough to disabuse anyone of this suspicion. For one thing the *Life of Mohammed* is explicitly written for an Indian Muslim audience, as is clear from the way Sir Sayyid describes Muir's biography:

When this work appeared, the curiosity it excited among the reading public was only equalled by their impatience to peruse it, but no sooner was it found that the simplest and plainest facts connected with Islam and Mohammed had been strained and twisted and distorted, in short, subjected to the Procrustes' process in order to make them the indices or exponents of the author's prepossessions and prejudices, then the interest created by the announcement of the work fell, *instanter*, to zero. As to the young Mohammedans who were pursuing their study of the English literature and were perfectly ignorant of their own theology, the perusal of the work under consideration raised in their youthful mind the question, if what Sir Wm. Muir has written is a misrepresentation of plain and simple facts, what are those facts in reality?⁷

Sir Sayyid presses home the strictly apologetic purpose of his work in the following passage, making it abundantly clear that he used English to appeal to young Muslims who had been educated in that language:

It being indispensable that the reader should know something respecting the works connected with the present production, all of which are in the English language, and will materially assist him in forming a correct opinion of my humble efforts; and as, moreover, the work was specially intended for the use of those Mohammedan youths who are pursuing their English studies, it has been written in that language; but being myself wholly ignorant of that splendid tongue, so as to be unable even to construct a single sentence in it, I here publicly and sincerely express my deep obligations to those friends by whose literary assistance I am now enabled to submit to the attention of an indulgent and intelligent public the first volume in its complete and digested form.⁸

Though it was written in English and published in England, Sir Sayyid's book was not intended to engage English scholars of Islam in a dialogue, and the fact that it did not in fact attract their attention is quite typical. Because there was no intellectual engagement with Aligarh's modernism on the part of British or European writers, we shall see that these modernists could treat the threat presented by colonial knowledge in the same way as that posed by classical

⁷ Syed Ahmed Khan Bahador, *Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (Lahore: Sh. Mubarak Ali, 1979), xix.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xx.

antiquity. In both cases the challenge was perceived intellectually, as coming from a set of axiomatic ideas, rather than politically, as a challenge coming from a people. For Sir Sayyid, therefore, the use of English played a very specific role, that of appropriating the West's modernity for Islam without incurring the obligation of entering into a dialogue or debate with it. This is the only way, for instance, that we can understand Sir Sayyid's repeated use of the English phrases "word of God" and "work of God" in his Urdu commentary on the Quran, for they do not contribute anything more to the text than their Urdu equivalents. In other cases Sir Sayyid's use of English terms ran counter to their Urdu equivalents, as with the English subtitle *The Mohammedan Social Reformer* for his journal *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq*, itself an Arabic term linked to a tradition of ethical writing going back to classical antiquity.

What Muslim apologetic did, then, was to hollow out European terms and categories to make room for another way of conceptualizing modernity within them, and in so doing to construct a relationship with imperial thought that was as little dialectical as it was dialogical. For example, we can see from Sir Sayyid's definition of modernity that its Western provenance was neither opposed to nor taken up as a point of departure for self-definition, but instead only qualified and added to, in a way which made the notion slightly more capacious while quite transforming it in the process. In other words the intellectual transformations of Islamic modernism were derived from a logic of accommodation which was apologetic in character, not from a dialectical encounter with or reaction to the West.

This lack of a dialectical encounter with the West had the further consequence of ensuring that Islamic modernism failed to develop a system of thought or even a way of thinking systematically, for its accommodations were not developed intellectually and therefore had no histories. Thus having stretched a European concept of modernity to include Islam in a way that is almost inadvertently radical, Sir Sayyid lets it go instead of extending his thinking of modernity in any systematic fashion, seemingly content to let it stand as a fragment. However, this was not a strategy applied only to Western terms and categories, for in his famous commentary on the Quran Sir Sayyid attributed both the principles and content of his exegesis to Muslim thinkers in the past, though he could only do so by selecting these thinkers in almost random fashion, and by fixing on fragments of their work and not their views taken as a whole.

Here, then, is the luxury of apologetic thought, whose very weakness, whose partial and unsystematic nature, permits it to disengage from categories peculiar to the West and so achieve a degree of autonomy that is by no means bereft of intellectual adventure. This is an important point to make, since much of the scholarship on Islamic modernism assumes as an article of faith that its relationship with the dominance of Europe must be oppositional or at least

reactive, and therefore that Muslims must define themselves in dialectic with the West. But opposition or reaction entails neither dialectic nor self-definition. So, in his *Life of Mohammed*, Sir Sayyid Ahmad sought to refute Sir William Muir's biography of the Prophet not simply by proposing his own interpretation backed by Muslim sources, but rather by using quotations from other European writers to prove his argument. Such a procedure does not even allow the West to stand as a straw man, let alone as some kind of dialectical negation.

Islamic modernism pressed up against European categories of thought but did not enter into a dialectical relationship with them, which is why it was partial, unsystematic and in fact apologetic in the first place. It is equally important to point out that the partial and unsystematic nature of Islamic modernism also means that it had no autonomous being either, or rather that its autonomy was not based on constituting some full presence as an alternative to Christianity or the West. The fact that Muslim writers tracked the modernity of Europe so closely, even parasitically, only adjusting it in places to accommodate themselves, surely means that their own modernity could not itself be a dialectical category of identity, which is to say some kind of alternative modernity. Indeed it could even be seen as providing evidence for the impure and derivative character of Europe's modernity, by pointing to its descent from medieval Islam.

While the new Islam or Muslim community of the modernists was certainly a positive presence, we might see its modernity not as another or alternative mode of being so much as a method or practice, one approaching the West in an indirect and even parodying way. Thus while relations between the gentlemen of Aligarh and their British rulers had little to do with dialogue or dialectic, they were still relations of intimacy. In the historiography this intimacy is labeled loyalism and left at that, as if loyalty was something self-explanatory and attributable merely to the ignorant, cowardly or mercenary impulses of its unpatriotic adherents. As it turns out these loyalists were far less British than their nationalist or anti-imperialist compatriots, who really did engage in dialogue and dialectic with their masters, though only because they had become so much like them and were indeed their products. Quite apart from the reasons of self-interest that supposedly kept them loyal, the Aligarhists enjoyed a peculiar kind of intimacy with the British, one that was based neither on acceding to Christianity or the West nor on repudiating either. It was precisely an intimacy based on apologetics, which is the most common but least noticed quality of Muslim thought and behavior in the nineteenth century.

CLASSICAL ETHICS FOR A STATELESS MODERNITY

Islamic modernism had been hollowed out of European categories to allow for a thoughtful experience of the modern. For Aligarhism this experience was

conceived primarily in terms of ethics, which was derived from the concept of culture or refinement (*tahzib*). Indeed culture was to provide one of the most common ways of thinking about Muslim modernity during this period. The term was often used in compounds like “contemporary culture” (*tahzib-e hazir*), or “refinement of morals” (*tahzib ul-akhlaq*), the title of Aligarh’s journal. This latter phrase refers to an Arabic work of the same name, Miskawayh’s eleventh-century treatise on ethics, whose title subsequently entered Islamic history as a common name for the subject. The phrase “refinement of morals” also belonged to a tradition of ethics deriving from classical Greek thought, one concerned with the meaning of behavior in general rather than with religious or social reform in particular. But what did this concern with behavior mean in its Indian setting? On the one hand an aristocratic social code that had been grounded in classical ethics was appropriated in order to define a set of national characteristics peculiar to Islam, which was now being seen as constituting the totality of Muslim beliefs and practices, and therefore belonging to the Muslim community as a whole. On the other hand this very nationalization of ethics in terms of the Muslim community indicated an unwillingness or inability on the part of the Aligarhists to identify themselves in terms of the legal and political categories proper to a state.

Modernity was being conceived in the classical terms of a beautiful life rather than in those of citizenship, even though this art of living had now come to constitute the morality of a new kind of national community, which did not participate in the life of a state. Ethics, in other words, was not a kind of citizenship, and Islam was not a kind of state, but both might well have served as ciphers for the citizenship and state that were denied to colonial subjects in general and minority populations in particular. The Muslim community for which the Aligarhists spoke was in fact a nation in suspense, one that struggled to position itself in a non-demographic space to avoid a politics determined by categories of majority and minority. Sir Sayyid was therefore deeply suspicious of the newly founded Indian National Congress, which was in this period as reformist and loyal as he would like, because of its attempt to represent Indians demographically.

It was the principle of representation that Sir Sayyid found so dangerous, realizing that it would show up Aligarh’s own unrepresentative position among India’s Muslims while at the same time defining them all merely as a demographic minority in the colonial state. He thus attacked the congress as a Hindu organization by default if not by design and tried unsuccessfully to link Hindus and Muslims at a regional level by rank, language and ethnicity rather than separating them by number countrywide.⁹ He even refused to conceive of Muslims

⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, “Siyasat awr ham”, in *idem*, *Khutbat-e Sir Sayyid*, Vol. 1 (Lahore Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1973), p. 30.

as a national group in the demographic sense, recognizing inchoately the belief that Muslim politicians would voice in the century to come: that in spite of the size of the Hindu population, India's Muslims could not really be thought of as a minority, not least because they formed numerical majorities in sizeable parts of the country. It was the anomalous position of the world's largest Muslim population occupying the place of a minority that permitted the modernists both their intellectual autonomy and their universalistic claims.

Linking their movement to the tradition of classical ethics going back to the Greeks allowed the Aligarhists to do several things. First, it enabled them to look beyond the horizon of some purely colonial modernity by placing themselves in a genealogy within which the challenge of this modernity could be compared to that of Greek thought for early Islam. Even in his specifically religious writings, Sir Sayyid addressed the challenge of modernity by calling for the development of a new science of theology or *ilm al-kalam*, referring thus to Islam's earliest apologetic tradition, which had been formulated in response to the Muslim encounter with Greek philosophy in its classical as well as Jewish and Christian forms. This genealogy was an important theme in Aligarhist thought, and one that indicated very clearly its overwhelmingly intellectual as opposed to political approach to modernity. Thus Sir Sayyid's friend, the celebrated poet Ghalib of Delhi, compared the British conquest of India to the Arab conquest of Persia in his journal of the Indian Mutiny of 1857–8.¹⁰ What is interesting about this comparison is the fact that it puts the British in the position of the Muslims of yore, this being another example of the peculiar intimacy that loyalists enjoyed with their masters. Yet Ghalib's conquered Persia was, like her Indian counterpart, a civilization that had to be cherished and mourned. Other writers compared Christendom's conquest of Islam to that of the Mongols who destroyed the Abbasid Caliphate only themselves to turn Muslim. These genealogies tell us that the modernity associated with colonialism was being interpreted according to the universal standards of Islam's own history, in a way which allowed Muslims to situate themselves in a narrative space that extended much further than India and empire, whether geographically, historically or politically. Indeed it was only in this transhistorical realm that dialogue and debate between peoples or religions could occur, though only in the traditional form of conversations between those living and those long dead.

Such conversations extended even to the "word of God", with Sir Sayyid's commentary on the Quran demonstrating the sacred book's veracity by showing how its teachings conformed to the "laws of nature", as represented in nineteenth-century science. Victorian science was the most recent of the divine text's many interlocutors, who had existed over a span of time that bracketed

¹⁰ Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbuy* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1970).

Greek philosophy with Victorian nature. That this was not a naive undertaking is clear from Sir Sayyid's commentary, where he recognized the implications of his apologetic:

It is said to us sarcastically (or tauntingly): "When the Greek wisdom, astronomy and philosophy spread among Muslims, then considered in agreement with actual reality, the doctors of Islam confirmed these portions of the Koran which seemed in agreement with those sciences, and tried to work out corroboration of those portions (of the Koran) which seemed opposed to these sciences. Today when it is known that those sciences were founded on wrong first principles, that their astronomy was absolutely opposed to reality, and when natural sciences have made more progress, you contradict those meanings which earlier doctors determined according to Greek sciences and adopt other meanings which agree with the sciences of the present day. It will be no wonder if in the future these sciences advance further and the things which today appear fully ascertained may be proven wrong. Then need will arise of establishing other meanings of the words of the Koran and so on. So the Koran will be a toy in the hands of people."¹¹

Sir Sayyid responded to this accusation by welcoming it "as glad tidings for it is our conviction that the Quran is in accordance with the reality of affairs".¹² In true apologetic style he chose not to dispute the taunt leveled at him but merely pointed out that he considered the Quran miraculous because it could bear differing interpretations over time, all of which might nevertheless be said to be true to the sacred text. This indeed is the only miracle acknowledged in the book, which he considered to be God's voice engaged in an interminable conversation through history. A similar consideration permitted Sir Sayyid to pen a chapter on "Prophecies Respecting Mohammed" in his *Life of Mohammed*. Following venerable precedent, he tried to show that the coming of the Prophet was foretold in Christian and Jewish scriptures. Far from contradicting the "laws of nature", this search for prophecies was in fact an attempt to make a trans-historical conversation possible between religions by exploring the various kinds of meaning that ancient and medieval texts could bear without betraying their logic in the process.

The intellectual genealogy of Muslim modernism also allowed it to undermine the categories of the colonial state, those of religion and politics, for example, which the language of ethics quite easily ignored. After all what did it mean to think about being Muslim upon the ground provided by ethics? One thing it meant was thinking about Islam not in the presence of the colonial state, whose categories were not even addressed by this language, so much as in the absence of traditional sources of authority, since the colonial world here functioned only

¹¹ *Introduction to Sir Syed's Commentary on the Quran* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), 18–19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

negatively, making possible a new set of relations between Muslims. Given the attenuation and even destruction of aristocratic, clerical and saintly authority in British territory, the Aligarhists were able for the first time to think about a collectively ethical way of being Muslim, one without an organic relationship with traditional institutions of authority. And it was this ethical Islam, the belief and practice making up a new moral community, that provided a background to Aligarh's modernity by rendering provincial terms like religion (*din*), sect (*firqa*), school (*mazhab*) and mystical order (*tariqa*), along with the various authorities linked to them.

To some degree this means that Aligarhist religion was secularized insofar as it now came to be part of the totality of beliefs and practices pertaining to a community: Islam having become a "way of life", as the modernist cliché would have it. This does not mean Aligarhists did not entertain religious beliefs or practices, only that these were now parts of Islam seen in terms of a moral and potentially national community that included many other things besides. Indeed the modernists spilt much more ink on such issues as education, comportment and attire, all familiar subjects of classical ethics, than on specifically religious matters having to do with God, scripture and the like. In other words traditional religion (being bound by certain authorities, faith in the primacy of divine action, and so on) was subsumed in a prospectively national culture for which ordinary Muslims were themselves suddenly responsible. As had happened in Europe, however, secularism in India ended by producing religion in the form of spirit, which is to say in the form of an abstraction purified of the very culture that gave rise to it. So it was Sir Sayyid's secularization of Islam that allowed him to place religion in the realm of pure spirit in his *Life of Mohammed*:

Now the religious idea differs from every other in this respect, that man's belief in everything, religion excepted, depends or is based on a previous conviction of its truth; the religious idea, on the contrary, appears to be innate, and is accepted, entertained, and acquiesced in, independently of any evidence of its truth, derived through the instrumentality of the external senses.¹³

The problem with spiritualizing religion in this way, of course, is that it was no longer attached to any institutional authority and so literally up for grabs. But the gentlemen who populated modernist circles could not allow Islam's religious spirit, to say nothing of its secular body, to become in any sense democratic. Religion was therefore defined as a set of divine prescriptions about behavior that itself came to represent popular volition insofar as it was not attached to any particular institutional authority, not least that of Aligarh, but

¹³ Syed Ahmed Khan Bahador, *Life of Mohammed*, vii.

appeared to emanate from Islam itself as the totality of Muslim beliefs and practices. It was the very secularization and nationalization of Islam as a moral community, then, which led to the fetishism of divine law as something that could be generally identified with because it was no longer tied to any particular authority. Indeed Islamic law, which became the subject of enormous debate among colonial officials and scholars towards the end of the nineteenth century, continued for Muslims to refer simply to a populist version of the old aristocratic discourse on ethics, as the conduct of a beautiful life. It was only in the new century that such law actually took on the characteristics of a juridical system, thus indicating at least a partial Muslim appropriation of political categories belonging to the state.

The modernist meditation upon authority I have been sketching was overtaken in the middle of the twentieth century by a politics organized around states and ideologies that counted liberal as much as fundamentalist Muslims among its votaries. But Aligarh's modernity continues to live amidst these new forms of Muslim belonging, which have inherited the modernist conception of Islam as an anthropomorphic authority, one embodying the totality of Muslim beliefs and practices. Liberal and fundamentalist forms of Islam have also inherited the apologetic character of modernist thought. Indeed Aligarh seems to have obtained copyright over the very idea of Islam's modernity in southern Asia, whose Muslims must still return to this nineteenth-century movement, if only to refine, denounce or even ignore it. So while Sayyid Ahmad Khan's commentary on the Quran is still not taught at the university he founded, its very absence gives form to the interpretations that have come after it by constituting their point of flight.

The Aligarh Movement's luxurious apologetic marked the beginning of an intellectual tradition that still colonizes all thinking on the subject of Islam's modernity. But instead of posing only a limit to this modernity, the movement offers Muslims today the opportunity as well as the basis for thinking it anew, especially at a time when Islam has been rendered stateless yet again by virtue of its globalization. The Indian history we have been exploring has a curious resonance in today's world of Muslim minorities and migrations, to which it now offers itself as a global opportunity. Indeed this opportunity might be inscribed in the very survival, otherwise unaccountable, of Aligarh's nineteenth-century apologetic, which, like the tortoise in the fable, has managed to beat the hare of Europe's modernity to the finishing line of history.

BEYOND CULTURE-CONTACT AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE: “GERMANISM” IN COLONIAL BENGAL*

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This essay will explore the presence of Germany as a key trope of Bengali nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. It will problematize the exhaustiveness of a conventional spectrum of interpretation in the analysis of colonial intellectual history that has been defined at one extreme by the cultural violence of colonial interpellation and at the other by a hermeneutic conception of authentic intercultural encounter across the limits of great traditions. When Bengalis actually began to interact directly with Germans and German thought, it was an encounter whose parameters had already been deeply determined in the course of the preceding forty or fifty years. But I shall also argue that this appeal to the trope of Germany emerged from within a more complex, multilateral configuration in which “Germany” was itself a key figure of Victorian discourses in Britain itself.

The dominant tradition of locating South Asian cultural and intellectual history overwhelmingly within the directly colonial relationship has narrowed the scope of existing historiography. How, then, might we begin to think about India’s location within a multilateral set of imaginary and practical relationships whose axes would seem to exceed the conventional colonizer/colonized binary? If one were to survey the political literature of high-colonial Bengal for explicit comparisons between India and other countries, France (especially the France of the various incarnations of republicanism), Italy (especially the Italy of Mazzini), Ireland (especially the Ireland of rural immiseration and Home Rule), Japan (especially for a decade or so after its victories over Russia in 1904–5), and (starting in the 1920s) the Soviet Union would certainly be found to feature prominently. But it was Germany, I would suggest, that entered most intimately

* This paper was originally presented at (and indeed emerged as a response to the basic themes motivating) a conference organized by Kris Manjappa on the Exchange of Ideas and Culture between South Asia and Central Europe, held at Harvard University, 28–9 October 2005.

into the social imagination of colonial Bengal's high-caste Hindu service class and landed gentry in the period of the efflorescence of its new nationalism in the later nineteenth century and the early twentieth. This essay will explore the presence of Germany as a key trope of Bengali nationalist discourse in this crucial period, examining not only the more obvious political-economic references, but also the larger structure of historical, theological, and philosophical discourse with which these were so deeply bound up.

In part the aim of this short essay will be to problematize the exhaustiveness of a conventional spectrum of interpretation in the analysis of colonial intellectual history that has been defined at one extreme by the violence of colonial interpellation, where practices of colonial domination impose new forms of subjectivity on the incommensurable otherness of non-Western cultural forms, and at the other by a hermeneutic conception of authentic intercultural encounter across the limits of great traditions. Both Edward Said and Wilhelm Halbfass, the iconic figures defining these two poles respectively, ultimately share a common conceptual framework—a binary of power and communication—that fundamentally obscures the historical conditions of possibility for Bengal's reception of key themes of German historical, philosophical, and political-economic thought. For Said, the systematic operation of Western power-knowledge served to obscure the human truth of the Orient—to replace the really real Orient with a simulacrum.¹ For Halbfass, in contrast, the structure of “power-knowledge” was never so systematic that it could prevent fruitful and meaningful encounter across epistemic and cultural horizons—especially in the case of German Orientalism, whose relationship with India bypassed the distorting constraints of a directly colonial relationship.² In both of these approaches, history is seen in oscillation between the two polar registers of the *longue durée* (the transhistorical stability of the great traditions of Indian and European civilizations) and the ephemeral moment (the almost completely undetermined contingency of phenomenological encounter across the incommensurable difference of cultural subjectivities that by definition defies an encompassing structural determination). The encounter between East and West is thus understood as a dialogue between two continuous “traditions,” neither of which is characterized by any significant conditions of historical specificity beyond the punctuating temporality of the event or conjuncture.

Yet when Bengalis actually began to interact directly with Germans and German thought in any significant way, they were no more experiencing an existential

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

² Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988); Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

encounter with an opaque cultural other than they were engaging in anything so general as civilizational encounter. This is not to say that their encounter was insignificant or redundant, but rather that it was an encounter whose parameters had already been deeply determined in the course of the forty or fifty years before it actually occurred. In this essay I shall use a series of examples to show how the intellectual encounter with Germany was a profound presence in the nationalist reconstruction of historicist, religious-revivalist and political-economic discourses from around the 1870s. However, I shall also argue that this appeal to the trope of Germany was occurring frequently without explicit acknowledgement and largely unselfconsciously. A more self-conscious intellectual and cultural encounter with Germany did not occur until the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Bengali intellectuals before this time were, however, already deeply invested in the appropriation of elements of German classical and historicist thought. But Bengal's relationship with Germany emerged from within a more complex, multilateral configuration in which "Germany" was itself a key figure of Victorian cultural, philosophical, theological, philological, and political discourse in Britain itself—and, we might well argue, a key trope of a global historical moment stretching from the second half of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth. It would thus be misleading to suggest that the relationship with Germany represented a straightforwardly discrete axis from the relationship with Britain, or that it represented anything like a straightforward instance of culture contact. Rather, we must move beyond merely supplementing some existing laundry-list of metropolitan intellectual and cultural influences on what is implicitly understood to be a purely reactive colonial intellectual arena, to inquire more systematically into the less tractable question of the historically determinate, socially produced significance of "Germany" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This essay is intended to open up a space for the genuinely historical investigation of Bengal's encounter with Germany—a historical investigation systematically precluded across the Said–Halbfass spectrum. What if we tried to think beyond the Scylla of colonial ventriloquism and the Charybdis of cultural authenticity? Bengal's twentieth-century encounter with Germany was mediated by a preceding history of overdetermined intellectual appropriation—that is to say, a history of appropriations whose parameters were defined by a discursive regularity deeper than the contingent circumstance of any particular situated and motivated utterance, and within a historical context that exceeded the actual intertextual references that form the substance of Bengali Germanism as an *explicandum*. Recognizing this might in turn allow us (in principle) to move to an analysis of the spatio-temporal specificity of Bengali Germanism—that is to say, the way in which the peculiar resonance of German thought and the German "example" was constituted simultaneously on a local and a global level from

around the 1870s. This paper does not, I hasten to add, set out to give anything like an adequate account of the historically determinate, socially produced significance of “Germany” as a global historical trope. This brief examination of the appeal of “Germany” as a figure of thought in later nineteenth-century Bengal seeks merely to establish a more constructive way of framing an investigation, circumventing the familiar back-and-forth oscillation between power’s imposition of arbitrary forms and dialogue’s exchange of authentic content.

I

Let us begin with the notion of “the classical” that was so important to nineteenth-century Bengalis’ historical self-understanding. The conception of a “classical age” of Hinduism preceding the Muslim invasions was certainly not an invention of the later nineteenth century, or even initially of Bengali Hindus themselves. But if we look at Bengali discourses of “the classical” in the first half of the nineteenth century, we find at their core assertions of the prevalence in India’s antiquity of forms of utilitarian rationality, citizenship, justice, property, and independence, values that had allegedly been compromised only in the subsequent degeneration and ossification of medieval Indian society.³ The development both of a more scholarly and of a more nationalistic historical consciousness in the 1870s, however, turned on a profoundly different construction of the classical. Rajendralal Mitra, an antiquarian-cum-archeologist who was both intellectually and politically prominent in Calcutta from the 1850s until his death in 1891, is the conventionally acknowledged founder-figure of Bengali historical scholarship. While Bengalis had been working to reconceptualize their past in terms of a specifically “historical” conception of temporality and causality since the early nineteenth century, it was Mitra who first adopted the detailed evidentiary norms of serious antiquarianism, and thus was able to enter into direct engagement with his European scholarly contemporaries.

The central polemic that drove Mitra’s works was the systematic rejection of widely accepted arguments that ancient Indian art or architecture had been derived from Greek models made available initially by Alexander’s empire and then by the Greco-Bactrian kingdom established in the northwest of the

³ See, for just two brief examples, Rammohan Roy, “Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females,” in *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose, 4 vols. (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1982), 2: 373–84; and Peary Chand Mitra, “The State of Hindoostan under the Hindoos, No. 2,” in Goutam Chattopadhyay, ed., *Awakening in Bengal in Early Nineteenth Century (Selected Documents)* (Calcutta: Progressive, 1965), 157–81.

subcontinent in the second century BCE. In an 1872 review of Albrecht Weber's thesis that the plot of the *Ramayana* may have been based on that of the *Iliad*, Mitra would write with scathing irony that

Alexander during his three weeks' stay in the Punjab taught the Indians, according to different authors, the art of preparing made dresses, the mode of piling bricks and stones for buildings, the principles of architecture, the plan of harnessing horses, writing, drama, astronomy, philosophy, and all and everything that convert a race of naked savages into civilized men, and it would be preposterous to suppose that he would not leave behind him a copy of old Homer for the edification of the Indians.⁴

It was in fact Mitra's "protest against the opinion that was then getting very common to the effect that the Hindus had first learnt the art of building in stone from their Greek conquerors" that embroiled him in his most celebrated controversy with James Fergusson, the scholar that he himself acknowledged as the "highest authority on Indian architecture," but who would reciprocate in turn by characterizing Mitra as exemplary of the intellectual superficiality that disqualified the Bengali babu from full juridical equality with the British.⁵

Yet alongside this polemic against Greek influence, what we find in Mitra's (frankly turgid) exercises in antiquarian description and archeological reconstruction is nothing other than a consistent effort to provide the empirical foundations for the construction of an Indian "classical" systematically analogous to that of ancient Greece. It was against Greek standards that Mitra would most often measure the architectural achievements of pre-Muslim India and find them worthy.⁶ It was, he fancied, a basic "cannon of art criticism" that no one would question, that "[n]o nation of ancient or modern times has evinced a higher sense of the beautiful in art" than had "that great sanctuary of ancient art, the sacred land of Greece."⁷ But more fundamentally than this, it was specifically the unadulterated purity and unity of their "genius" that raised the Greeks so far above those derivative and eclectic hacks, the Romans. It was this same purity of genius that characterized India's ancient art and architecture: "looking at it as

⁴ Rajendralal Mitra, "The Homer of India," *Mookherjee's Magazine*, 1 (1872), 53.

⁵ Rajendralal Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa Volume One* (New Delhi: Today and Tomorrow, 1986; first published 1875), 2; Rajendralal Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa Volume Two* (New Delhi: International Books, 1984; first published 1880), 78; Rajendralal Mitra, *The Indo-Aryans: Contributions towards the Elucidation of their Ancient and Medieval History*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1881), 1: i-ii; James Fergusson, *Archaeology in India with Especial Reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralala Mitra* (New Delhi: K.B., 1974).

⁶ Rajendralal Mitra, *Buddha Gaya, The Hermitage of Sakya Muni* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1878), 113-15; Mitra, *Antiquities I*, 59, 65ff, 77-8, 107.

⁷ Mitra, *Antiquities I*, 3, 70, 169; Mitra, *Antiquities II*, 14, n. 7; Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, 113.

a whole it appears perfectly self-evolved, self-contained, and independent of all extraneous admixture," possessing

its particular rules, its particular proportions, its particular features,—all bearing impress of a style that has grown from within,—a style which expresses in itself what the people, for whom, and by whom, it was designed, thought, felt, and meant, and not what was supplied to them by aliens in creed, colour and race.⁸

It was precisely because Indian art and architecture were *like* the Greek in being primordially original that they could not possibly be derived *from* Greece. And nor, Mitra suggested, should we be surprised by this purity of genius, for the "Aryans who came to India had the same intellectual capacity" as their glorious Greek cousins, belonging to the same "intellectual race."⁹ The plausibility of Mitra's anti-diffusionist, analogical construction of Indian genius thus rested on a narrative of racial diffusion, which not only provided the first principle from which the argument for originality could proceed, but at the same time tied "the classical" at stake in Mitra's work to a specifically "organic" conception of nationhood.

Now it would admittedly be foolhardy to suggest that references to ancient Greece automatically translate into references to Germany. After all, the nineteenth century had seen Britain more generally turn its gaze from Rome to Greece.¹⁰ But Mitra was attempting to make ancient India do precisely the work for the modern Indian nation that Greece had been pressed into service to do for nineteenth-century Germans.¹¹ The Greece that was being referenced in Mitra's work—the Greece that was the historical trope that rendered his "classical" meaningful—was hardly the Greece of utilitarian reason imagined by George Grote. Nor, really, did it have much to do with the Christian Platonism of Mitra's contemporary, Benjamin Jowett—though at least with this idealist turn we are getting closer. Mitra's was rather the Greece of romanticism and philhellenist humanism of which, in Rudolph Pfeiffer's classic formulation, "Winckelmann was the initiator,

⁸ Mitra, *Antiquities I*, 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3, 117.

¹⁰ Frank M. Turner, "Why the Greeks and not the Romans in Victorian Britain?" in G. W. Clarke, ed., *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 61–81; Frank M. Turner, "The Triumph of Idealism in Victorian Classical Studies," in *idem*, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 322–61; Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

¹¹ Cf. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985* (London: Vintage, 1987), chaps. 5–6.

Goethe the consummator, Wilhelm von Humboldt . . . the theorist.”¹² Seen from this perspective, the celebration of primordial Greece over derivative Rome can be seen as much more than mere intellectual fashion, becoming instead a celebration of the insurgence of the new nationalism of the late nineteenth century (represented by the new German state) over an older imperial model (represented by a cosmopolitan British global hegemony).

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Mitra was steeped in classical German scholarship, nor even that he would have recognized the crypto-Germanism of his own position. As a historian of ancient India, he was inevitably reading more than his share of German authors, but it is very doubtful that he was reading them in German (there is no indication that he could even read German), or that he had a clear sense of the wider political stakes driving that scholarship in the domestic context of its production and reception. However, a glance at nineteenth-century British materials makes it clear that he did not need such a familiarity for my more general point to stand: a figure of Germany was already implicit in the construction of a later nineteenth-century conception of the Indian “classical.” The “Germany” that was functioning as a kind of tropological unconscious in Mitra’s scholarship was also at work in metropolitan Victorian Britain. Britain’s own post-utilitarian construction of Greece was itself almost entirely mediated through German classical idealism and philhellenist humanism, as was the entire tradition of culture-criticism from Coleridge through Arnold and beyond.¹³ For our purposes, then, it is sufficient to recognize that “Germany”—not the empirical place but the intellectual construct that stood behind the Victorian concept of “Germanism”—was connotatively never very far from the heart of the nationalist conception of India’s “classical” heritage. We can perhaps attribute the widespread latency of this trope not only to Bengalis’ general unfamiliarity with the German language, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the status throughout the nineteenth century of both romanticism and idealism as pan-European modes of thought that would only gradually be reparticularized by German intellectuals in the late nineteenth century (and especially after World War I) as “German.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, it seems

¹² Rudolph Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 170.

¹³ Cf. Turner, “Triumph of Idealism,” 350; Turner, “Why the Greeks?” 76–7; Andrew Sartori, “The Resonance of ‘Culture’: Framing a Problem in Global Concept-History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47, 4 (October 2005), 676–99.

¹⁴ This is not a history I have space to reconstruct here, but for important contributions to the history of the Germanization of German intellectual traditions in the late eighteenth century, the late nineteenth century, and the post-World War I era, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 3–28; T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660–1789*

safe to say that, whether or not Mitra himself was aware of it, he was engaged in the 1870s in consolidating and substantiating a historical narrative that already structurally implied (even if it never actually stated) that India was Asia's Germany. How could Bengalis not react to their eventual encounter with Germany with an overdetermined form of familiar recognition?

II

For my second example, I turn to the intertwined spheres of Hindu theology and philosophy. The later nineteenth century saw the emergence to prominence in Bengal of a new brand of "traditional" gurus, whose prestige rested in large part on the romantic appeal of their rural-folk idiom and lack of formal Western-style education—starting most famously with Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great guru both to late nineteenth-century Calcutta's educated middle class and to Bengal's most revered Hindu nationalist guru, Swami Vivekananda.¹⁵ But aside from their halo of indigenous authenticity, one other feature that stood out in these new gurus was their role in promoting specifically tantric themes in public intellectual life. "Tantra" is a rather vague term that refers both to a genre of Hindu and Buddhist texts and, more relevantly for our purposes, to a set of theological principles and austere bodily practices that were best adapted to the inferior brand of human being that predominated in the *Kaliyuga* (the world's present, last, and most degenerate age), when few individuals were capable of rising to the more demanding rigors of the older paths to salvation. Jeffrey Kripal has demonstrated Ramakrishna's tantric orientation.¹⁶ But the best-known explicit late nineteenth-century defense of Tantra came from the charismatic saint Sivachandra Vidyarnava, and it is through his *Tantratattva* (now remembered thanks largely to Sir John Woodroffe's famous translation) that we might best grasp, first, the tantric insistence on the non-duality of the phenomenal world and spiritual emancipation and, second, the convergence of

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 232–65; Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1990); Jörg Fisch, "Zivilisation, Kultur," in O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Kosellek, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 679–774.

¹⁵ See Partha Chatterjee's discussion of the appeal of Ramakrishna to the Bengali educated middle class in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), chap. 3.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

this tantric imagination with the language of German classical idealism in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth.¹⁷

Sivachandra founded his defense of tantrism on a critique of both dualist theism and abstract monism from the standpoint of what I have elsewhere called an immanentist monism.¹⁸ That is to say, he rejected both the fundamental separateness of the godhead from the created world (including the worshipper), and the notion that the phenomenal world represented only illusion cloaking an all-embracing and unchanging transcendental unity. Rather than approaching divine truth from the standpoint of an abstract knowledge of divine truth (*jnan-yoga*, the path to emancipation from worldly attachment through gnosis, a more difficult path more appropriate for the virtuous men who existed in earlier ages), the tantric devotee (generally maintaining his status as a householder rather than renouncing worldly attachments) instead sought to approach divine truth from within the flux of phenomenal experience. So “despite the essential truth of the monistic principle” that the diversity of phenomena cloaks the underlying unity of existence, tantrism does not “at the outset ignore this visible, palpable dualistic world . . . [I]n order to realize monistic truth, one must progress slowly through the dualistic world.” For the dualism of the phenomenal world (i.e. the experience of the world as composed of diverse entities and qualities) was nothing but the expression of the fluctuating form of appearance of the transcendental godhead. The divine was thus composed of two aspects: the undifferentiated, unchanging, and unthinkable unity of the masculine, transcendent principle (*siva*); and the feminine, self-differentiating principle (*shakti*) immanent to, and present as, the phenomenal world itself. From this standpoint, the phenomenal world is in fact itself the expression of a whimsical divine play, and the “Divine Mother” (Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and so on) who represents this active, feminine principle “is in every molecule, in every atom, in all things which constitute the world.” The “illusory” quality of phenomenal existence lies solely in the fact that its dualistic appearance serves to cloak the deeper monistic substance that constitutes it. So the tantric devotee

¹⁷ For biographical details about Sivachandra, and his relationship with Woodroffe, see Kathleen Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: “An Indian Soul in a European Body”?* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 98–108.

¹⁸ Andrew Sartori, “The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904–1908,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23, 1 and 2 (2003), 271–85. As I explain in that paper, parallel theological developments were occurring in Vaishnavism, the other great theological current of Bengali Hinduism, through adaptation of the key theological concept of *acintyabhedabheda* (inconceivable difference within non-difference). In fact, Sivachandra and Bijoykrishna Goswami (one of the most influential late nineteenth-century Vaishnavite gurus) were collaborators in the *Sarvamangala Sabha*—see Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe*, 99.

does not renounce worldly attachments, but rather embraces “both dualism and monism” and “realizes the sweetness of the play” by “plung[ing] into the non-dualistic Truth after having churned the dualist world” (i.e. recognizes the unity of god in phenomenal experience itself).¹⁹ The proper embrace of dualism took the form not of contemplation but of a method of what Woodroffe would translate as “spiritual self-culture,” the scripturally prescribed practice of *sadhana*. If the intellect is incapable of judgment in matters about which it had not yet been instructed, then it is by practice (*karma-yoga*, the path of action) that spiritual self-realization must be acquired.²⁰

Now it is certainly unlikely that a pundit like Sivachandra had been exposed in any meaningful sense to German idealism. The same was certainly not true, however, of his disciples. Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay was a professor of philosophy at the Bengal National College (a nationalist educational initiative founded in 1906 during the Swadeshi upsurge) and later Ripon College, both in Calcutta, as well as one of Woodroffe’s collaborators. (He would also, later in life, go on to be known as a popular tantric guru in his own right, Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati.) Human history had begun, Mukhopadhyay explained in his 1912 work *India: Her Cult and Education*, with a differentiation initiated by the subordination of human life to the diversity of natural environments. Human reason, in contrast, has innately tended to rise to the universal and hence overcome such differences. Reason is not, however, born pure; it emerges through the particular forms endowed by Nature and History. “[I]ndividuality is not a parasitic growth that can be operated away leaving the original stuff intact,” but is rather the medium through which reason must realize its ideal form in the context of the actual.²¹ Reason cannot structure society without harnessing sentiment, and this means that reason must constantly operate through, rather than against, forms of social particularity.²² The human mind, human societies and Nature itself, however, are all but “eddies” in what Mukhopadhyay self-consciously called the “primordial motherstuff.”²³ Through self-denial in the lower planes of human existence, man detaches himself and

¹⁹ Sir John Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra: The Tantra-tattva of Sriyukta Siva Candra Vidyarnava Bhattacharya Mahodaya* (Madras: Ganesh, 1978), Part I, 164–74; Part II, 34–44.

²⁰ Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, Part I, 123–34.

²¹ Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati (Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya), *India: Her Cult and Education, The Complete Works of Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati Volume One* (Chanduli: Saranam Asram, 1980), 20–24.

²² *Ibid.*, 7–9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11–12. This thesis is much elaborated in Mukherjee’s subsequent two works, *Approaches to Truth* (1914) and *The Patent Wonder* (1915), both included in the volume cited above.

gradually comes to free his subjective existence from his subordination to Nature's necessity:

Life must be lived in matter in such a fashion that it may rise to master it at last: the conditions of possible spirituality are (a) recognition of matter, (b) co-ordination of matter and (c) conquest and conversion of matter. In its primary presentation, matter is an alien order to be obeyed and borne with, in its final representation it is a submissive vehicle of life's expression—the interval between the two is long and eventful like history itself.²⁴

To jump directly to abstract truth, as some "prior forms" of Vedantism had advocated (like Sivachandra before him, he had in mind not just the older textual tradition of the eighth-century theologian Sankaracharya, but also the theological rationalism advocated by Rammohan Roy in the early nineteenth century), was a grave error, for in Hinduism "the conditions of the actual are so treated as to progressively make for actualisation of the ideal: not *ignoring* the actual but *educating*."²⁵ The "dynamical" history of India had thus been none other than the (re)appropriation of Nature by Spirit through human activity.

Mukhopadhyay was more or less exactly rearticulating Sivachandra's argument, but with a key difference: tantrism had become a form of philosophical idealism, the phenomenal flux of divine play had become the rational unfolding of History, and Sivachandra was now Hegel perfected.

The soul is the centre of a radiation which is the universe itself; it is the Reality that *appears* as the world . . . [T]he Source makes an eject of itself in its own emanation . . . The Soul, in creating limits, imprisons and contradicts itself: life is essentially a going back, a reconciliation, a grand resurrection From the Spirit's point of view it is conquest and not *adaptation*: the Spirit cannot think of adapting itself to its own echo, reflex, eject.²⁶

The institutions and ideals of Hindu society, founded on "*realistic idealism*" and moved by "*spiritual automobility*," were thus ideally suited to create a new social order in which economic and political institutions were subordinated to the human ends of spiritual self-realization (rather than becoming ends in themselves as in Western society), and in which high philosophy was "*lived*" in everyday practice rather than merely "*produced*" in abstraction.²⁷ Subjective freedom arises when humanity no longer needs to adapt to natural necessity, and has instead, through Society, subordinated Nature to its own spiritual ends. Through a "*Self-education and Self-concentration*" that falls "back upon the home resources and methods of life-culture," Hindu society would enter a final

²⁴ Swami Pratyagatmananda, *India: Her Cult and Education*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39, 46. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 69–72. Emphasis in original.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18, 65–9. Emphasis in original.

phase of “*Self-fulfillment and Self-expansion* over a world which after its cycles of *Hellenization, Romanization* and *Teutonization* now restlessly awaits a new cycle of *Indo-Aryanization*.”²⁸ The old German-romantic conception of the philosophy of the ancient Aryan Upanishads as the primitive ancestor of modern idealism was now reversed, with modern idealism struggling to recapture ancient truths.

But we must hesitate a moment before we immediately align the unmistakable Hegelianism of Mukhopadhyay’s narrative with Germany. The Bengalis of the later nineteenth century were getting their Hegelianism from that hotbed of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century idealist philosophy—Britain itself. The great early twentieth-century historian of Indian philosophy Surendranath Dasgupta, for example, was introduced to the idealism that he would embrace (both as his own philosophical standpoint and as a key organizing category of his characterization of Indian philosophical traditions) not by a German but by a Briton: John McTaggart of Trinity College, Cambridge. Once again we find “Germany” travelling as a latent trope in Bengal’s cultural exchanges with Britain before we can seriously talk about cultural exchanges with Germany itself. A good example of such unselfconsciousness in this early history of intellectual appropriation is Pramathanath Bose, the respected geologist who in later life would become a fiery polemicist against Westernization in all its myriad forms. Bose’s writings drew heavily on British culture-criticism (itself inextricably steeped in German romanticism and idealism) to sharply juxtapose the “spiritual” and “cultural” emphasis of “Eastern civilization” to the materialistic superficiality and bestializing Mammonism of “Western civilization,” unmistakably paralleling the *Kultur/Zivilisation* dichotomy. Yet writing in the wake of World War I, Bose himself used “Kultur” to symbolize the ultimate outcome of the ethical void at the heart of Western civilization: “Modern culture has become as unlike ancient culture, as Bottom transformed was unlike his former self. There can be no better proof of this than the fact that modern culture has culminated in the ‘Kultur’ of Germany.”²⁹ Bengali Germanism could remain far from self-recognition well into the twentieth century.

We cannot find “Germany” in Ramakrishna or Sivachandra, yet we cannot miss it in Mukhopadhyay—or for that matter in the entire turn that Bengali philosophy took in the generation that paid them homage, beginning with Brajendranath Seal’s explicit Hegelianism, passing through Surendranath Dasgupta’s study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy as forms of philosophical

²⁸ Ibid., 82. Emphasis in original.

²⁹ Pramathanath Bose, *National Education and Modern Progress* (Calcutta: Kar, Majuder & Co., c. 1921), 14; and see also Pramathanath Bose, “The Root Cause of the Present War,” *The Modern Review*, 17, 3 (March 1915), 320–23.

idealism, and becoming fully explicit in Benoy Kumar Sarkar's identification of the "Ramakrishna-Vivekananda complex" as the philosophical inheritor of Fichtean idealism's celebration of "the mind's dominion over the world," and, precisely as such, the religious movement "destined to constitute the living religion of our country, of our masses and classes, during the present [twentieth] century."³⁰ In these latter works, tantrism was being systematically reformulated as a modern discourse of socio-historical philosophy—"reformulated," in other words, not so much in terms of its theologico-philosophical tenets as in its primary domain of reference. What made Ramakrishna and Sivachandra's tantrism so compelling to a generation of nationalists whose forebears of the preceding half-century had rather been drawn to dualistic theism or abstract monism? Surely the answer to this question will prove indistinguishable from the answer to an ostensibly quite different question: what made Bengalis so receptive to "German" classical idealism in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth? If that is the right question to ask, then we will again have to conclude that cultural and intellectual encounters with Germany were overdetermined—not only by relationships of direct (colonial) domination, but by the latent trope of "Germany" that was already coming to pervade Bengali intellectual life in the later nineteenth century.

III

In "Politics," Kamalakanta, the eponymous hero of a series of 1870s satires penned by Bankimchandra Chatterjee (later nineteenth-century Bengal's most distinguished man of letters), describes a skittish dog begging a small boy for bones and fleeing as soon as the boy's mother shoos him away. He then sees a bull, which simply ignores the mother's chastisement and feeds as it wishes. "I have seen two kinds of politics," he concludes, "one of the dog variety and one of the bull variety." Bengali politicians were most definitely of the dog variety; Bismarck was an example of the bull.³¹ Germany was already in the mid-1870s, when Bankim penned this satire, standing forth for Bengalis as a model of

³⁰ Brajendranath Seal, *New Essays in Criticism* (Calcutta: Som Brothers, 1903); Surendranath Dasgupta, *Indian Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962; first published 1933); Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Creative India: From Mohenjo Daro to the Age of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (Lahore: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1937), 469–70, 669.

³¹ Bishnu Bose, ed., *Bankim racanabali: sahitya samagra* (Calcutta: Tuli-Kalam, b.s. 1393 [c. 1986]), 92–4. For a more general discussion of the significance of Bankim's satires in his intellectual trajectory from liberalism to neo-Hinduism see Andrew Sartori, "Emancipation as Heteronomy: The Crisis of Liberalism in Later Nineteenth-Century Bengal," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 17, 1 (March 2004), 56–86.

political self-empowerment—as well, we might already intuit, as a model for the defiance of British global hegemony by the new “national” model of political economy. The trope of Germany, derived largely from British sources, would come to confront Britain as the external negation of its own imperial order.

As Manu Goswami has recently reminded us, Friedrich List’s *National System of Political Economy* “became a foundational text for anti-colonial nationalists in South Asia.”³² Goswami makes a compelling case for the necessity of viewing the popularity of List’s text not primarily in terms of colonial imposition, but rather of the resonances that global socio-historical and spatio-temporal structures establish between otherwise disparate locations. The “Germany” that List represented becomes, from this perspective, a reformulation of the national ideal from the standpoint of a marginal economic space using state-led political and economic interventions to strengthen an emergent “national economy.” If List resonated with later nineteenth-century Indians, it was because, for the first time in the later nineteenth century, the contradictory structures of empire constituted, alongside the deepening integration of the subcontinent into imperial-cum-global scales of production and exchange, a spatial schema that could be grasped through List’s concepts of “national economy.” This is what Goswami calls a “sociohistorical” conception of modularity.³³

List’s first translator into Bengali was Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a polymath polyglot who, after a youthful commitment to the nationalist educational ideals of Satish Chandra Mukherjee and a period of tenure as one of Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay’s colleagues at the Bengal National College, spent over a decade traveling the world before returning to Calcutta to become one of the most prominent Bengali intellectuals of the 1930s. Sarkar was an advocate of state-led development through the instrumentality of “the law—the fiat of the State,” as the direct political-economic correlate of the dynamic human spirituality embodied most adequately in India by what he called, as we have already seen, the “Ramakrishna-Vivekananda complex”—that is to say, of the transfiguration of Ramakrishna’s tantric teachings into the Hindu nationalism of Swami Vivekananda’s world-conquering, man-making theology. “Man as an individual or in groups has but one function, and that is to transform the gifts of the world into which he is born, namely Nature and society, into the instruments of human and social welfare,” Sarkar would declare in 1936. “It is not Nature, region or geography that in the last analysis determines man’s destiny. It is the human

³² Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215.

³³ Manu Goswami, “Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Toward a Sociohistorical Conception of Nationalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44, 4 (October 2002), 770–99.

will, man's energy, that recreates the topography and natural forces, humanizes the earth and spiritualizes the geography."³⁴ He would thus explicitly identify the technical and economic creations of the industrial era as directly "spiritual" expressions of the human "will to conquer." The present age could be seen, counter-intuitively, as "more spiritual" than any previous precisely because of the expansion of material forces in the form of technology and industry.³⁵ If in Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay we saw the tantric critique of abstract monism extended into a philosophy of history, in Sarkar we see that philosophy of history extended into a political and economic theory of the state.³⁶ And once again at the heart of this political theory stood the trope of "Germany."

Sarkar, who spent a significant amount of time in Germany, published in German (as well as Bengali, English, French, and Italian), and founded a society to promote Indian-German exchange, was already in the wake of World War I looking to a Germany stripped of its colonies as a potential ally for a resurgent Asia:

The continent of Asian peoples who are striving to achieve their freedom and shatter the fetters of the colonial powers is looming large in the consciousness of Germany's liberators as a great field for cooperation and comradeship on which to work out the spiritual reconstruction of mankind. These colonial powers are the common enemy of Young Asia and New Germany. Automatically therefore German idealists have their natural allies in Asian revolutionaries.³⁷

But Sarkar also saw deeper roots to this conjunctural alliance, pointing to the "many abiding influences that Goethe's homeland and German 'Kultur' have left on the life and thought of the Indian people during the last two generations or so." Aside from the many literary influences of Goethe, Heine, and Schiller, the philosophy of Fichte had been an inspiration to young nationalists, the *Bhagavad Gita*'s doctrine of *nishkam karma* (desireless action) had been identified with Kant's categorical imperative, and, most importantly of all, "Vedantic monism" (the doctrine of the underlying unity of existence) and other forms of philosophical and theological reflection had "obtained a powerful support from the idealism of Hegel," who had been a major "formative force in the making of modern Indian thought." With the rise of the Swadeshi movement in support of indigenous

³⁴ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Expansion of Spirituality as a Fact of Industrial Civilization* (Almora: Advaita Ashram, c. 1936—reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharat*, May 1936), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–6.

³⁶ I have tried to elucidate the structural connections among neo-Vedantic philosophy, historicism, and national political economy in Sartori, "Categorical Logic."

³⁷ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia and Other Essays on the Relations between the East and the West* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1922), 36.

manufactures in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, he went on to explain, the “appreciation of German civilization as the exponent of romanticism, metaphysics, idealism . . . began to be supplemented by our recognition of Germany as the land of technology, exact sciences, industrial research, fruitful economic policy, and applied sociology,” leading directly to the new interest in List’s *National System* “as the Bible of a people seeking a rapid transformation of the country from the agricultural to the industrial stage.” And so, whereas Bengalis had previously been indebted for much of their “Germanism . . . to English intermediaries . . . it was at the beginning of the present century that we began to look for direct contacts with Germany and the German people.”³⁸ By 1934 Sarkar was declaring the Hitler state to be the culmination of a quest for the kind of dynamic national self-empowerment that Bengal and India desperately needed, and Hitler himself “the greatest of Germany’s teachers and inspirers since Fichte,” as the product of “the moral idealism of a Vivekananda multiplied by the iron strenuousness of a Bismarck.”³⁹ Sarkar provides us here with a succinct narrative of the sense both of inevitable convergence and of familiar recognition that shaped his intellectual encounter with German philosophy and both the political theory and practice of statism. Neither of these, I hope, should be surprising to us any longer.

IV

Let me conclude by restating the two key points that I have been trying to make in this paper: first, Germany cannot be seen solely as an alternative vector of communication to the British-imperial connection, for it had emerged to prominence as a key trope both within nineteenth-century British intellectual life and in later nineteenth-century India’s conceptualization of its relationship with Britain. Second, Bengal’s encounter with Germany can be adequately grasped neither in terms of the orientalist problematic of power, nor in terms of its binary alternative, authentic understanding. Rather, because the figure of “Germany” was already implicit in the historical, philosophical, and political discourses that Bengalis were formulating in the later nineteenth century, and because Bengal

³⁸ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Influence of German Civilization on Modern India,” *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 September 1932.

³⁹ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Hitler State: A Landmark in the Political, Economic and Social Remaking of the German People* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1934), 1, 4, 13. Sarkar, a longstanding critic of parochial racial attitudes, perversely characterized the Nazi regime’s antisemitic purges as anti-racist efforts at affirmative discrimination in favor of an underrepresented German nation, with ironic prescience declaring that the “Jewish question bids fair in the same manner” as the old Catholic-Protestant problem of the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf* “to be liquidated in Nazi Germany in a few years” (31).

was structurally identified with Germany in those discourses, a sense of inevitable convergence and familiar recognition between Bengalis and Germans was overdetermined before substantial contact had really occurred. In fact, it is this overdetermined identification that makes Halbfass's contention that the German encounter with India was characterized by "communication and understanding" so persuasive. Yet, by obscuring the latent identification that underpinned the singular significance of an encounter that so self-consciously exceeded the imperial framework, it is also ultimately what makes that contention so profoundly misleading.

STRIKING A JUST BALANCE: MAULANA AZAD AS A THEORIST OF TRANSNATIONAL *JIHAD*

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This article probes the link between anti-colonial nationalist thought and a theory of jihad in early twentieth-century India. An emotive affinity to the ummah was never a barrier to Muslims identifying with patriotic sentiments in their own homelands. It was in the context of the aggressive expansion of European power and the ensuing erosion of Muslim sovereignty that the classical doctrine of jihad was refashioned to legitimize modern anti-colonial struggles. The focus of this essay is on the thought and politics of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. A major theoretician of Islamic law and ethics, Azad was the most prominent Muslim leader of the Indian National Congress in pre-independence India. He is best remembered in retrospectively constructed statist narratives as a “secular nationalist”, who served as education minister in Jawaharlal Nehru’s post-independence cabinet. Yet during the decade of the First World War he was perhaps the most celebrated theorist of a transnational jihad.

“The earth is thirsty, it demands blood, but of whom? Of the Muslims,” Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), the leading pro-Congress Indian Muslim nationalist, had raved in the late summer of 1913. As far as he could see, Tripoli was soaking with Muslim blood as were the plains of Persia and the Balkan Peninsula. Now Hindustan too was athirst for Muslim blood. In an egregious display of British arrogance and brute power in Kanpur in August 1913, Muslims protesting the demolition of a lavatory attached to a mosque were fired upon indiscriminately, leaving several dead. “Oh you Muslims,” Azad asked tauntingly, “where will you now reside?” There was consolation in the thought that Indian Muslims were finally on a par with their oppressed co-religionists in other parts of the world: “Oh Muslims of the world, accept the gift of our spilt blood, cut veins and tortured corpses!”¹

An emotive affinity to the *ummah* was never a barrier to Muslims identifying with patriotic sentiments in their own homelands. Regionally based and religiously

¹ Abul Kalam Azad, *Majmua-i-Azad* (Mirpur: Arsalan Books, no date), 49–54.

informed identities were not deemed to be incompatible in the late precolonial and early colonial periods of Indian history. Regional patriotisms were typically tinged with a religious sensibility.² It was in the context of the aggressive expansion of European power and the ensuing erosion of Muslim sovereignty that the classical doctrine of *jihad* was refashioned to legitimize modern anti-colonial struggles. New tensions in international politics in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth provide the general context of the globalist vision of Sayyid Jamaluddin al-Afghani, the peripatetic Persian propagandist and political activist, credited with fashioning the modern form of Islamic universalism. His ambiguous intellectual legacy in India can be traced by examining the thought and politics of pro-Congress Muslims such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958). A major theoretician of Islamic law and ethics, Azad was the most prominent Muslim leader of the Indian National Congress in pre-independence India. He is best remembered in retrospectively constructed statist narratives as a “secular nationalist”, who served as education minister in Jawaharlal Nehru’s post-independence cabinet. A false dichotomy between good “secular nationalism” and bad “religious communalism” in statist historiography has long bedevilled our understanding of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-colonialism. Religious sensibility was part and parcel of nationalism in colonies as far apart as India and Ireland. Hindus and Muslims in India were trying in this period to contribute to an emerging discourse on the Indian nation. Azad was a product of his times. During the decade of World War I he was a staunch Indian patriot and at the same time perhaps the most celebrated theorist of a transnational *jihad*.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was the foremost Indian Muslim intellectual to blend the politics of Islamic universalism with a comprehensive anti-colonial vision derived from a close study of the Quranic concept of *jihad*. If Afghani can be described as “the most complete Muslim of his time”,³ Azad was the exemplar of the erudite Muslim scholar. His independence of mind was circumscribed only by conviction in the Quran and the Prophetic *sunnah* as perfect guides for all aspects of life. Azad grasped the wider ethical meanings of *jihad* to make a forceful case for fighting colonial injustices. As such, his ideas on *jihad* owed less to Afghani than to the Islamic tradition in which he was reared. His father was a spiritual preceptor with a chain of disciples. While he

² See C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press: 1998), chaps. 1–3; and Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), chap. 1.

³ W. C. Smith, “Afghani,” in M. Ikram Chaghatai, comp., *Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2005), 491.

refused to assume the hereditary mantle, Azad's understanding of Islamic mysticism gave his thought much more poignancy than anything Afghani's political writings could achieve. Where his ideas converged with those of Afghani, as well as those of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida of Egypt, was in their stringent opposition to the *ulema* of the time who had compromised religion for worldly gain. Although he remained in constant dialogue with like-minded co-religionists in other parts of the Muslim world, Azad's universalistic vision was shaped by the experience of subjugation under British rule.

A child prodigy and a precocious adolescent, Azad blazed onto the public scene at the age of fifteen, brimming with ideas of social justice, religious reform and abhorrence of British rule. Though impressed by Sayyid Ahmad Khan's translation of the Quran, it was his exposure to the Bengali militant groups Jugantar and Anushilan, and contacts with the frontier rebels, that shaped his political world view. In 1908 he travelled through West Asia and met anti-colonial nationalists in Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. In Egypt, Azad kept company with the followers of Mustapha Kamil, the leader of the National Party (*Al Hizb al-Watani*), who proposed confronting the British and rejected the relatively more accommodating line taken by Abduh's *Al Manar* group. Kamil's preference for territorial rather than Islamic nationalism and policy of zero tolerance of British imperialism helped Azad formulate his own anti-imperialist political agenda.⁴ He not only retained these contacts but named his first paper, an illustrated Urdu weekly called *Al-Hilal* (The Crescent), after a publication of the same name and format which appeared from Egypt.

Published from Calcutta in July 1912, *Al-Hilal* provided Azad with a perfect medium to expound his views on *jihad* as legitimate anti-colonial struggle. It was read by and read out to literate and literacy-aware sections of the Muslim population in Bengal, the United Provinces and Punjab. Peppered with Quranic quotes, the paper was designed to stir Muslim sympathies for co-religionists fighting imperialist powers in Asia and Africa. Article after article extolled the gallant Muslims resisting European aggression in the charred and bloodied battlefields of Tripoli and the Balkans. The message was evocative and unequivocal. Part of a seamless worldwide *ummah*, Muslims were religiously bound to reject arbitrary lines on the map drawn by European imperialism to divide and weaken them further. Answerable only to Allah, they could not suffer subjugation and had to fight to regain temporal sovereignty. They could do so with greater efficacy by forming a united Muslim front under the Ottoman *khalifa*.

Azad's aim was not merely to report but to educate and guide Indian Muslims. He was at one with Sayyid Ahmad Khan in considering ethical reformation as a

⁴ Syeda Saiyidien Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence: Abul Kalam Azad—a Fresh Look* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42–3.

requisite for Muslim social and political revival. But this is where the agreement ended. In one of his earliest pieces in *Al-Hilal* he declared that the correct ethical path was thin and sharp like a sword's edge below which rose the burning fires of hell. An ethical conception of life entailed love, service and respect for humanity, irrespective of any religious or racial difference. It was best to avoid conflict and refrain from criticism. But to take this to the extreme by falsifying the truth to please oppressors was the obverse of decency. The Quran enjoined Muslims to practice *amar bil maruf wa nahi anal munkur*, commanding the good and prohibiting the wrong, which in Azad's opinion was the effective meaning of *jihad*. Commanding the good was impossible without prohibiting the wrong whose other name was *jihad fi sabil allah* (*jihad* in the way of God).⁵

Muslims were described as the best community in the Quran because they were expected to eradicate instability and injustice. They would be replaced by another more deserving community if they failed to act against the forces of disequilibrium. Muslims were enjoined to follow the middle path to establish a just and virtuous society—"give full measure when ye measure and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination" (17:35). This duty had been compromised by the confusion caused by two apparently contradictory verses of the Quran. "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones to attain felicity" (3:104) suggests that the duty is limited to a select group. But verse 3:110 addressed to the *ummah* is incumbent on all: "Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith it were best for them; among them are some who have faith but most of them are perverted transgressors."⁶

Seeing no contradiction in the two verses, Azad rejected the consensus among Quranic scholars that only the *ulema* can preach the good and prohibit the wrong. This was a "dangerous error" which had cost Muslims dearly. The obligation to preach the good and prohibit wrong was the duty of the entire community and required exertions (*jihad*) in understanding the Quranic message. By restricting it to a small group, Muslims had lost the universal vision of Islam. He attributed the primary cause for the decline of all religions to the assumption of godly authority by the religious leaders. Islam had tried avoiding the pitfall by ruling out any sort of a clergy and making the preaching of good and prohibiting of wrong obligatory upon all believing Muslims. Despite being established to prevent religion from becoming the private fiefdom

⁵ Abul Kalam Azad, *Sada-i-Haq* (compilation of selected writings from *Al-Hilal*) (Lahore: Muktaba Jamal, no date), 86–9.

⁶ Ibid., 31–3.

of priests, Islam was burdened by the very problem it came to eradicate. The general duty to God was turned into a private right by the *ulema* in which no one else had a right to interfere. The result was that *amal bil maruf wa nahi anal munkur* had been replaced by *amar bil munkur wa nahi anal maruf*—preaching the wrong and prohibiting the good! Unaware of their primary responsibility, Muslims were ignorant and beholden to the *ulema*. They could not feel the presence of God's government over them; their eyes were closed to virtuous actions and wrongdoing was overlooked as if no one had eyes to see or ears to hear.⁷

A religiously inspired ethics could not rest on belief (*itiqad*) alone but demanded proof in right actions (*amal-i-salah*). As a core Islamic principle, *amar bil maruf wa nahi anal munkur* was “not just a mental idea but a practical human principle” meant to initiate positive change in every aspect of individual and collective life. Spreading good and removing wrong was the essence of *jihad* because non-peaceful actions are needed for the sake of peace. Just as the law on homicide aims at preventing murder, the Quran sanctions the use of the sword to eliminate sedition even as God approves of mercy. But mercy cannot be established unless the users of force are put in their place. In addition to being merciful, God is just. When disequilibrium exceeds all limits, the sword has to be brandished. To humiliate those who humiliate, Azad held, was in accordance with God's mercy and love. Since Muslims are urged to cultivate God's ethics, those with true faith (*iman*) had to express disapproval of wrongdoing openly and forcefully.⁸

Azad identified himself with the great Sindhi mystic martyr Sarmad Shaheed, who preferred death to compromising his conscience.⁹ The life of a believer is a constant struggle to emulate the Prophetic model. Like the mystics, he held that a believer's love of God is the essence of true faith (*iman*). Without love of Allah, the responsibility of enjoining good and prohibiting wrong cannot be fulfilled. Those prompted by selfish interest rather than love of God cannot create inner space to fight evil. They are polytheists though they might profess faith. It behooves the true believer to give everything to others except himself, which can only rightfully belong to God. True *jihad* is waged when Muslims see and hear nothing but God and perform the duty of commanding the good and prohibiting the wrong solely to win the approval of their beloved. Without going into the all important question of how God's approval is to be gauged,

⁷ Ibid., 34–9.

⁸ Ibid., 20, 44–50.

⁹ Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence*, 45–51.

Azad sanctions rebellion and, better still, an “arrogant *jihad*” against all satanic temporal authorities.¹⁰

A discussion of the deeper ethical purposes of *jihad* served as the springboard for Azad’s political treatment of the idea in both theory and practice. The concept of *jihad* meant that when “deviations from the prescribed path assumed the form of weapons of war, the devotees of truth and keepers of *tawhid* (unity of creation) should also have the sword in their hands.” This was *jihad* against an external enemy. But when transgressions were a result of inner spiritual depravity and ignorance, the principle of commanding the good and prohibiting the wrong provided the means to wage *jihad* through the spoken and written word. Following earlier scholars of Islam, Azad identified three kinds of *jihad*: 1) verbal proclamations commanding good and prohibiting wrong, 2) giving property and goods for the cause and 3) the actual waging of war and fighting (*qital*).¹¹ He refused to restrict *jihad* to a spiritual struggle but disagreed with those advocating the indiscriminate killing of infidels. The idea that Muslims murder all non-Muslims, which so terrified Europeans, formed no part of Islamic teaching. Islam only sanctioned the right to fight those who opposed and oppressed Muslims qua Muslims.¹²

Affirming armed conflict as one possible means to counter Christian hostility toward Islam, Azad endorsed a *jihad* against the British. Any struggle to break the chains of oppression and reestablish truth and justice was *jihad*. Indian Muslims had to awaken from their sleep and see how their co-religionists elsewhere had risen for the cause of freedom granted to them by Islam. He valorized the Sanusiya struggle against the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 and narrated moving stories of European atrocities. During the Balkan war *Al-Hilal* printed photographs of Turkish freedom fighters along with scenes of gory battlefields and religious oppression by European powers.¹³ These were provocative images for Indian Muslims licking their wounds after the egregious display of British arrogance and brute power leaving several dead at Kanpur in 1913. Seeing the opportunity to strike the Islamic universalist chord in Indian Muslim hearts, it was at this moment that Azad wrote the moving piece cited at the outset of this essay.¹⁴

By desecrating the Kanpur mosque for a mundane reason like straightening the road, the British had forfeited the right to Muslim loyalty. Lkening the

¹⁰ Azad, *Sada-i-Haq*, 57–8, 61–2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 88–9.

¹² Ian Douglas Henderson, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, ed. Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 111–12, 138–9.

¹³ Haméed, *Islamic Seal on India’s Independence*, 61–2.

¹⁴ Abul Kalam Azad, *Majmua-i-Azad*, 49.

Kanpur killings to the massacre in Karbala, Azad noted that the real casualty of the bullets fired on an unarmed crowd was British justice. The Christians accused Muslims of believing that women had no soul. But did they believe Muslims had no soul? Muslims had a soul but the British had killed it, forgetting the primary law of all religions: "you will not shed blood". By committing an unpardonable blunder, the British had turned the Kanpur incident into a matter of concern for the entire Islamic world:

Muslims from every corner of the globe sent us gifts in news about their difficulties and sacrifices in blood. We were embarrassed because we did not have a drop of blood to give in return. Now we are no longer embarrassed. Oh Muslims of the world, accept the gift of our spilt blood, cut veins and tortured corpses!¹⁵

Armed with a potent ensemble of local, national, and transnational symbols, Azad's *Al-Hilal* venture was a sensational success. Although closely monitored by the colonial state, it was not until after the start of World War I that the paper was forcibly closed down in November 1914. A year later it reappeared as *Al-Balagh*. But with Azad labeled the "most mischievous of agitators" in India, its run lasted a mere five months.¹⁶ After November 1914 Azad's discourse acquired a new edge as the British Empire was not just at war with the Ottoman Empire, but had now dispatched Indian Muslim troops to fight against their co-religionists in Mesopotamia.¹⁷ Journalism was not the only medium Azad chose to disseminate his anti-imperialist ideas. Verbal *jihad* was an equally important component of his efforts to educate Muslims on the importance of Islamic unity and the obligation of *jihad* against Western aggression. In speeches given over a long and productive public career, Azad developed his ideas on *jihad* to which he first gave expression through the pages *Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh*.

In a lilting speech in Calcutta on 27 October 1914 he compared the Islamic *millat* to a human body. A pinprick sustained by Muslims in a distant corner of the world was felt by the entire *ummah*. How could Indian Muslims not feel wounded and agitated by the sufferings of co-religionists? Muslims who had sold their souls to foreign masters might consider extraterritorial affinities with the *ummah* a dangerous manifestation of religious bigotry which had to be suppressed and, better still, eliminated.¹⁸ They were entirely mistaken in their reading of international politics. Picking up Jamaluddin Afghani's point about

¹⁵ Ibid., 51–4.

¹⁶ Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence*, 73.

¹⁷ On this first Gulf War of the twentieth century see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), chap. 2.

¹⁸ Abul Kalam Azad, *Khutbat-i-Azad* (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2004), 14–15.

Islam as a “civilization” and the “West” as a correlative and antagonistic historical phenomenon, Azad raised the specter of the civilizational divide between a menacing and conniving Europe and the unsuspecting and ill-prepared Muslims of Asia and Africa.¹⁹ The threat was not to countries but to Islam as a living religion. It was imperative for Indian Muslims to understand that if Islamic political power were destroyed, all the wealth and education from Aligarh could buy would have no meaning.²⁰

Europe’s solution to the “Eastern problem” was a nefarious plot to hammer the last nail in the Ottoman coffin. It took succour in the natural justice enunciated by Jesus, the “prince of peace”, in the book of Luke (19:27): “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.” It was no surprise that Europe did not consider the eradication of Islam to be human oppression. The natural laws of nations were meaningless in this game to dominate. Azad compared the European powers to a pack of wolves whose sole concern was to curb their rivals’ appetite for devouring the Islamic body politic so that all could get a piece of the prey. Europe considered the subjugation of Muslims as its greatest cultural service to the world in the twentieth century. The sacred sword of the Ottoman *khilafat* was the only security left for God’s religion and the Islamic way of life. Unless the entire Muslim world threw its weight behind the Turks, nothing could stop the armies of European Christendom. “Our relationship with the Turks is not simply based on religious affinity,” Azad announced, “but the more elevated one of religious reverence for the Islamic *khilafat*.” Raising the bogey of “pan-Islamism” and reviling the Ottomans was a satanic ruse of European politics to strike at the Muslim jugular.²¹

Azad belittled Europe’s arrogant claims of cultural and civilizational superiority, graphically pointing to its inhumanity in the bloodstained desert of Tripoli and to the mutilated corpses of Marakesh. Turks were the quintessential barbarians in the European chamber of horrors. But they had treated Italian prisoners of war graciously in contrast to the heinous crimes perpetrated on Muslims by European armies. If Muslims had a shred of “pan-Islamism” which they were accused of possessing, they would not be humiliated and ruthlessly killed. The hands that held the white flag of peace were undoubtedly sanctified. But only those hands could survive which controlled the sword. Force alone guaranteed a peoples’ existence and was the means to establishing justice to save human life and protect the oppressed. Faced with Western political and cultural aggression, it was the duty of all believers to engage in *jihad fi sabil allah*,

¹⁹ W. C. Smith, “Afghani,” 492.

²⁰ Azad, *Khutbat-i-Azad*, 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17–19.

remembering that while others were masters of their own lives, the lives of Muslims were the property of God.²²

This was as categorical a call for *jihad* as any given by an Indian Muslim under British colonial rule. Azad did not delve into the delicate issue of how Muslims, who in his own estimation had made a charade of Islam, could serve the cause of God by fighting Western aggression. The omission was more than just a matter of expediency. In his articles in *Al-Hilal* he referred to the wars in Tripoli and the Balkans as *jihad*, well aware that the word sent shivers up the spine of some people. He justified this on the grounds that it was Europe which was waging a new religious crusade against Islam. European armies were Christian armies when the Ottomans were the enemy. To consider the wars in Tripoli and the Balkans as Christianity's temporal wars was to release Muslims from the strictures of their religious laws on warfare. The potential effects of this could be explosive as Muslims in other parts of the world might retaliate by opposing and killing Europeans at random. Fighting (*qital*) and temporal warfare (*harb*) were not the same as *jihad*. The Quran prohibited Muslims from taking up arms against those not waging a religious war against them. This acted as a safety valve against Muslims breaking relations with Christians in India and fighting the British government. Those who abhorred *jihad* had to decide whether they wanted Muslims to abandon the idea and instead learn the methods of Europe's temporal wars.²³

In a treatise on the Islamic conception of war, Azad amplified the difference between temporal warfare and *jihad*. The Quran referred to the human bestiality and bloodletting on display in the killing fields of Europe as *harb*, *fitna*, *qital*, and *jidal*. Unlike wars in which human beings were mercilessly slaughtered and subjugated, the purpose of *jihad* was to establish peace, tranquility, and freedom. A means to stopping bloodshed and restoring the dignity of man, *jihad* was the exact opposite of war as *qital*, *harb*, or *fitna*. This was why the Quran used *harb* to refer to the political wars fought by the Prophet against those who broke treaties or by taking compound interest acted like highway robbers. These temporal wars had nothing to do with *jihad*. A warrior taken by his own success ceases to be a *jihadi* as there is no room for self-praise or arrogance in *jihad fi sabil allah*. The worldly conqueror wreaks havoc in the places he conquers while the true *jihadi* is moderate in his treatment of the vanquished and thinks only of winning God's favor.²⁴

²² Ibid, 19–23, 28.

²³ Azad, *Majmua-i-Azad*, 87–8.

²⁴ Abul Kalam Azad, *Islam ka Nazirya-i-Jang*, comp. Ibn Raai (Lahore: Basat-i-Adab, 1965), 7, 143–5, 152–60.

Unfortunately Muslims did not understand the meaning of *jihad*. Instead of developing political methods from the noble tenets of their religion, they had either entangled themselves in the Muslim League's slavish and suicidal politics or looked to the Congress for their welfare. There was "no greater blot on the sacred message of Islam than for Muslims to borrow the lessons of human freedom and the welfare of their country from other nations" as if they were their *kaaba* and *qibla*. In their educational, ethical, social, and political affairs, the leaders of Muslim opinion could think of nothing better than following the Europeans. They begged neighboring countries to help them win political freedom as if the miserable Muslims had nothing of their own. Muslim leaders talked incessantly about religion but their own lives were devoid of Islam. Their misguidance had rendered Muslims hollow inside. If Muslims had been Muslims, they would have known that whatever was good and beautiful in the world was because of Islam.²⁵

God had created human beings to live ethical lives. Human ethics were put through the most extreme test during periods of strife between nations. This was why Islam had selected *jihad* as the training ground for its ethical teachings.²⁶ A strong belief in the ethical superiority of Islam propelled Azad to wage a *jihad* with the pen and the tongue. He also engaged in the second form of *jihad* by spending his resources on the cause. Before the outbreak of war he was planning to initiate an Islamic movement by setting up an outfit called Hizbullah, literally the "party of Allah." The British suspected it of being a secret society, a view they confirmed when a Dar-ul-Irshad (House of Learning) was opened to train teachers for Hizbullah.²⁷

Once Turkey sided with Germany in the war, Azad pulled out all the stops to warn Indian Muslims of the grave error they were committing by supporting the British war effort. The Ottoman *fatwa* of November 1914 declaring *jihad* against Britain, France, and Russia lent bite to his efforts. Its most salient feature from Azad's point of view was the stipulation that Muslims living under Allied rule in India, Central Asia, North Africa, and the Balkans were obliged to come to the rescue of the Turks by attacking their non-Muslim rulers.²⁸ At a juncture when India's would-be premier anti-colonial leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was backing the government's recruitment drive, Azad favored allying with Germany and Turkey in order to acquire the military means to fight a *jihad* against the British. He was interned in April 1916 and kept in Ranchi for the next four years.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 12–17, 42–5.

²⁶ Azad, *Majmua-i-Azad*, 49–50.

²⁷ Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence*, 73–4.

²⁸ Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 90–94.

²⁹ Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence*, 73–4.

Prior to his arrest he became embroiled in a chain of activities originating in the Dar-ul-Ulum at Deoband under Maulana Mahmudul Hasan (d. 1920). Popularly known as Sheikhul Hind, Mahmudul Hasan had given an oath of allegiance to Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi's spiritual preceptor, Haji Imdadullah, and was considered by Azad as the heir of the "Waliullah Caravan."³⁰ Together with his enterprising student Obaidullah Sindhi, Mahmudul Hasan chalked out a secret plan to hasten the demise of the British in India. The "silk-letter conspiracy" gave the colonial state concrete evidence of the disloyalty of a politically vocal segment of its Muslim subjects. This was seen as justification for the Rowlatt Act which turned wartime ordinances into harsh peacetime legislation. Such measures as the British took to root out the sedition in India did not prevent Sindhi from giving practical shape to global anti-colonial activities of which Azad heartily approved.

Azad's release from jail in January 1920 gave a fillip to the pro-*jihad* lobby in India. During the *khilafat* and non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, he called upon Muslims to quit serving the British Indian army. Islam prohibited Muslims from killing their co-religionists. They were also forbidden to forge friendship with those who were killing and oppressing Muslims. The Quran distinguished between two kinds of Muslims, those who fight and oppress Muslims and those who do not. Muslims were bound by their faith to fight the aggressor with all the means at their disposal and befriend those did not fight them. It followed that Muslims should fight for the removal of the illegitimate British government in India by uniting with their Hindu countrymen.³¹ In saying this, Azad was not alone. He was entirely consistent with what was being advocated at this time by Mahatma Gandhi and the Ali brothers, Mohamed and Shaukat. This discourse on Hindu-Muslim unity had a venerable lineage going back to the days of the great 1857 revolt. As Gandhi's non-cooperation movement fused together with the *khilafat* agitation, even Swami Sradhanand, the Hindu preacher from the Punjab, was invited to speak from the pulpit of the Jama Masjid in Delhi. To dispel Muslim fears about letting Hindus inside mosques, Azad wrote an essay to prove that the gesture was consistent with the Prophetic *sunnah* and the *sharia*.³² Freedom of opinion and national independence were the lifeblood of human ethics. Nothing was more dangerous and disgraceful for

³⁰ Azad's letter to Maulvi Zahir al-Haq written after the independence of India, cited in Muhammad Hajjan Shaikh, *Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindhi: A Revolutionary Scholar* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1986), 261.

³¹ Azad's presidential address to the *khilafat* conference at Agra, 25 August 1921, in Abul Kalam Azad, *Khutbat-i-Azad*, 36–9.

³² Abul Kalam Azad, *Jama-ul-Shuhud: Dawakhil Ghair Muslim Fil Masjid*, comp. Masih-ul-Hasan, reprint (Lahore: Muktaba Akuwat, 1996).

a nation than the fear of death and the punitive force of temporal power.³³ Azad capitalized on the Prophetic *hadith* identifying opposition to an unjust ruler as the biggest *jihad*. Equating the anti-colonial struggle with *jihad*, he accepted the sedition charges brought against him by the colonial state. But he was not bound by laws contrary to the fundamental precepts of Islam. He could not, as a matter of conscience, remain loyal to a government which violated his religious freedoms.³⁴

Azad followed his courageous defence at the Karachi trial with a *fatwa* declaring *hijrat* mandatory for Muslims.³⁵ Since Indian Muslims could not wage a successful *jihad* against the British, they were religiously obliged to take refuge in a neighboring Muslim country. If it had been genuine, which it was not, Amanullah's offer to welcome co-religionists to his domain could have presented the British with a problem. Shifting the debate from *jihad* to *hijrat* was a calculated political gamble by Azad. But dressing temporal calculations in a religious idiom had catastrophic effects for thousands of Muslims who sold their belongings for a pittance in the vain expectation of a better quality of life in Afghanistan. With the *hijrat* movement celebrated as an achievement by the *ulema*, no one has dared point an accusing finger at those who helped in the making of this human debacle.

Some of Azad's most eloquent depositions on *jihad* as Islamic ethics were given from the center stage of Congress's anti-colonial politics. The Indian national struggle was a *jihad* because the British were waging a war to exterminate Muslims. If Muslims had any spark of faith left in them, they would befriend snakes and scorpions rather than make peace with the British government. Referring to the Prophet's constitution at Medina in which Muslims and non-Muslims were described as one nation, Azad asked Muslims to perform their religious duty by uniting with Hindus.³⁶ Any new history of political ideas must surely distinguish this discourse on Hindu-Muslim unity from the discourse on secularism. Azad was a key thinker and one of the most sophisticated to represent the former strand in anti-colonial thought that has been neglected by historians imbued with the dogma of statist secularism. The growing importance of the ideology of transnational *jihad* has imparted to his thought a new measure of contemporary salience. It was not as if there were two Azads—the youthful *jihadi* transformed into the mature secularist. The dominant idioms of Indian nationalism may have changed as it moved closer to the acquisition of state

³³ Abul Kalam Azad, *Islam Mein Azadi ka Tasawar* (Lahore: Muktaba Jamal, 2004).

³⁴ Abul Kalam Azad, *Qaul-i-Faisal*, reprint (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2004), 95–6.

³⁵ See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 214–24, for an analysis of the *hijrat* movement.

³⁶ Azad's presidential address to the *khilafat* conference at Agra, 25 August 1921, in Azad, *Khutbat*, 38–9.

power, obscuring an aspect of anti-colonialism steeped in religious sensibility that continued to permeate individual lives. It was an aspect that was not as territorially bounded as secular nationalism came to be. A new historiography turning its spotlight on the search for Hindu–Muslim unity rather than echoing statist slogans about secularism may turn out be of more than purely academic interest. The close imbrication of modern theories of *jihad* with anti-colonial nationalism in the early twentieth century might explain some of the appeal and popular legitimacy of resistance in the name of *jihad* in more recent times.

SELF, SPENCER AND SWARAJ: NATIONALIST THOUGHT AND CRITIQUES OF LIBERALISM, 1890–1920*

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In giving a historically specific account of the self in early twentieth-century India, this article poses questions about the historiography of nationalist thought within which the concept of the self has generally been embedded. It focuses on the ethical questions that moored nationalist thought and practice, and were premised on particular understandings of the self. The reappraisal of religion and the self in relation to contemporary evolutionary sociology is examined through the writings of a diverse set of radical nationalist intellectuals, notably Shyamji Krishnavarma, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Har Dayal, and this discussion contextualizes Mohandas Gandhi. Over three related sites of public propaganda, philosophical reinterpretation and individual self-reinvention, the essay charts a concern with the ethical as a form of critique of liberalism and liberal nationalism. While evolutionism and liberalism often had a mutually reinforcing relationship, the Indian critique of liberalism was concerned with the formation of a new moral language for a politics of the self.

It seems romantic to write of the self when by the turn of the twenty-first century many commentators have declared its death.¹ A hundred years ago, however, the self had a different fortune altogether. Whether it was in India or France, political and social thought was transfixed on the issue of the self, not only redefining its place in the world but also identifying it as a source of endless potential. A “crisis in liberalism” and a re-evaluation of religious experience brought the question of the self into renewed prominence.² Indeed, the turn of the twentieth century was the high moment for the self, complete

* I am grateful to the contributors of this volume and am also indebted to Marwa Elshakry and David Hall-Matthews for their comments.

¹ For instance Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Oxford, 2003).

² J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848–1914* (London, 2000).

with a new discipline that tried to unshackle it from its earlier vestiges, namely psychoanalysis. Moreover, by the opening decades of the twentieth century distinct national cultures were wedded to the idea of the self, albeit in different ways.³

If for psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century the self was a triad of layers of consciousness, then for the political thought of this period it was predominantly affixed to the idea of the individual. In late colonial India the self and its cognates became projects of a substantive reinterpretation and renovation encompassing philosophical enquiry and everyday technologies of self-empowerment. This essay, though, is not about recuperating the “Indian self”.⁴ Rather, it aims to give a historically and culturally specific account of the self in relation to the dominant political ideology of the period: nationalism. This question, however, takes us straight to one of the central problems of historiography that has defined both South Asian history and intellectual history more generally. Intellectual history has remained resolutely inward-looking with no more than gestures to the presence of non-Western thought in the wider world.⁵ On the other hand, South Asian history has showed remarkable persistence in being bound within the nationalist frame. Nationalism serves as a circular form of historical enquiry—it frames most studies and subsumes much of the nature of historical transformation within itself. Frederick Cooper’s recent work is a salutary reminder that while nationalism is an important question for historical enquiry, it is inadequate as a framework for writing history.⁶

The question of the self in Indian historiography is no exception. Recent works have recognized the connection between nationalist thought and the idea of the self. What the self represents, however, has been taken for granted and subsumed into the nation.⁷ In this essay, the emphasis will fall less on the naturalness of this connection and more on the reconstituted nature of the self. Further, rather than assuming an easy or natural fit between the two concepts of self and nation, the argument here is that it was a contradictory, tenuous and difficult relationship. While the nation and the self are not interchangeable categories, the two were inextricably embedded in mutual constitution. The idea

³ Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentred Subject* (Ithaca, NY, 1992).

⁴ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983).

⁵ Duncan S. A. Bell, “Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought”, *Historical Journal*, 49, 1 (2006), 281–98.

⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005).

⁷ Cf. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) and Manu Goswami, “From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870–1907”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40 (1998), 609–36.

of a reconstituted modern and Indian self both exceeded and breached the national. In other words, the modern self is at once more than and less than the nation.

In this essay I focus on the ethical questions that moored nationalist thought and practice and were seen to premise the (individual) self. This turn to ethics in the first two decades of the twentieth century, commonly understood as the period of “radical” Indian nationalism, has a curious intellectual trajectory. The ethical engagement had profound effects in centring the question of the “social” or society and the place of the self. While Bolshevism and Marxism acquired wide political currency in the late 1910s, evolutionary sociology, and Herbert Spencer in particular, became a significant interlocutor for radical nationalist thought in India.⁸ It is curious that Spencer, who is associated with social evolution rather than revolution, animated this critical strand of nationalist thought. While I do not aim to enlist him as yet another “influence” on the subcontinental horizon, it is nevertheless striking that Spencer, the arch laissez-faire liberal, could have provoked any interest among radical nationalists given their commitment to a politics of violent change. Was Spencer simply part of a generalized Victorian hangover that pervaded the atmosphere? Or rather, was it in the context of a substantive reappraisal of categories such as religion, ethics and the self that the question of evolutionism had more broadly been posed? Further, despite his anti-imperial stance, it was not Spencer’s anti-imperialism in itself, as I argue, that was the cause of the kinship between him and a diverse set of radical nationalists such as Shyamji Krishnavarma, B. G. Tilak or Har Dayal, but rather it was the valuation of the self that held some critical appeal.

The sequential paradigm of modernity and historical change was one that was shared across the political spectrum of liberal, Marxist and socialist thinking and owed its genealogy to political and social thought from as early as the late eighteenth century. The debates and differences were about the comparative merits of different civilizations, institutions and collective dispositions. However, it was the issue of the agent of change that threw into relief the political fault lines of key ideologies towards the end of the nineteenth century. Both Marxism and Spencer’s brand of evolutionary sociology shared a concern with an imagined future of a stateless utopia. Whether exploitative or regressive in nature, both these ideologies imagined a politics of transcendence of the state. It is not surprising that this ethical turn in nationalist thought was related to the self, since selfhood and morality are inextricably linked.⁹ Over three related aspects of

⁸ A. M. Shah, “*The Indian Sociologist*, 1905–14, 1920–22”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5 August 2006, 3435–8.

⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

public propaganda, philosophical reinterpretation and individual self-reinvention, this essay charts the concern with the ethical as a form of critique of liberalism. While evolutionism and liberalism more often than not had a mutually reinforcing relationship, the Indian critique of liberalism was about the formation of a new moral language for a politics of the self.

I approach Spencer here as an instance of what Stefan Collini has termed “intellectual property”, open to use and interpretation rather than a closed canon of stable concepts.¹⁰ In so doing the historiographical issue is the transformation of ideas within specific contexts rather than the dialogic or derivative nature of concepts that underpin methodologies of diffusion and difference. The specific concern that Victorian thought was not monolithic and that the “turn to empire” within liberal ideologies was not uncontested is well taken, but I interpret the nature of Spencer’s “anti-imperialism” primarily as an extension of his anti-statism rather than as a foundational critique of liberal imperialism.¹¹ In clarifying the nature of Spencer’s anti-imperialism, I contextualize the idea of anti-statism and the self in nationalist thought.

SPENCER’S ANTI-IMPERIALISM: HOME AND AWAY

Despite being one of the most popular thinkers and philosophers of the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer’s position appeared to have fallen into obscurity by the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless his reach in the late nineteenth century had been global. As an “eminent Victorian” his later near-universal obscurity seems less mystifying since the world stood transformed in almost unrecognizable ways by the mid-twentieth century.

Spencer’s corpus that purported to be a “total theory” was, above all, a description and explanation of historical transformation. His mid-nineteenth-century works and particularly *Social Statics* were concerned with the nature of human progress in the unfolding of what he called the “law of equal freedom” with this human progress directed towards the “end of the state”.¹² Critically, while social institutions and education were central, the state was categorically not an agent of progress for Spencer. The agent of change, however, remained “vague” and the value of individualism to human progress remained largely “unexplained”. Tim Gray has argued that Spencer resolved this long-standing problem in his corpus by decisively connecting evolutionary theory

¹⁰ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991).

¹¹ Duncan S. A. Bell, “Empire and International Relations”.

¹² David Wiltshire, *The Social and Political Thought of Herbert Spencer* (Oxford, 1978).

to social and historical transformation.¹³ The question of empire and its relationship with progress, Spencer's anti-imperial position notwithstanding, remained undertheorized in his corpus.

Towards the end of his career, in the early 1890s, following his refusal of all political and public office, Spencer took a very public stance against British imperialism. Earlier in the century he was sneered at as "unpatriotic" for opposing British aggression in Afghanistan and had unsuccessfully approached James Mill for a job in the India Office.¹⁴ A decade later, Spencer was commemorated by the radical Indian nationalist, Shyamji Krishnavarma, who instituted the first Herbert Spencer Lectureship at the University of Oxford in 1904.¹⁵ While Krishnavarma often likened Spencer to a latter-day Burke, Spencer's anti-imperialism was, unlike Burke's, not specifically rooted in any sympathy for "the Other".¹⁶ Fearing "a bad time coming", Spencer had finally ventured into public life to form the Anti-Aggression League in 1896.¹⁷ Imperialism, he predicted, would not only "encourage aggressive action from the colonies", but would also "increase military and financial demands" on Britain.¹⁸ He also famously warned Japanese ideologues of the dangers of imperialism, citing India as a cautionary history.¹⁹ At the same time, he refused to engage with Indian correspondents on continuing debates concerning the Age of Consent for marriage.²⁰

There were two interconnected aspects to Spencer's anti-imperialism and doctrine of non-intervention, one related to the question of power and liberty and the other to what can be termed Spencer's non-universalism. On the former issue, Spencer argued that imperialism increased the powers of the state and caused domestic enslavement through a curtailment of individual liberties. In other words, imperialism engendered a regression from industrial to militant forms

¹³ Tim Gray, "Herbert Spencer's liberalism: From *Social Statics* to Social Dynamism", in Richard Bellamy, ed., *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice* (London, 1990), 110–34.

¹⁴ "Patriotism", in Herbert Spencer, *Facts and Comments* (London, 1902), 88–91; and Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography* (London, 1904).

¹⁵ Krishnavarma sought his political life through patronage of individuals and causes. His biography charts his rags-to-riches career and the role of money in the making and breaking of many friendships. Indulal Yagnik, *Shyamji Krishnavarma: Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary* (Bombay, 1950).

¹⁶ Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

¹⁷ Herbert Spencer to Moncure D. Conway, 17 July 1898, in *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, ed. David Duncan (London, 1996; first published 1908), 410.

¹⁸ Spencer to J. Astley Cooper, 20 June 1893, in *ibid.*, 328.

¹⁹ Spencer to Kentaro Kaneko, 26 August 1892, in *ibid.*, 321.

²⁰ Spencer to Behramji M. Malabari, 20 July 1890, in *ibid.*, 296.

of society. This is what he called “rebarbarization”.²¹ Non-intervention and non-universalism were two sides of the same idea of the progressive unfolding of the “organism” of society. While the “social” was straitjacketed into an unfolding and developing “organism”, Spencer saw the histories of empire and nations in the form of a disconnect from this natural development. In turn, Spencer understood empire in terms of its intimacy with the state. Thus he deemed imperialism a regressive force, one that had the potential to disrupt the realization of the individual as the goal of human progress. His anti-imperialism was profoundly parochial and simultaneously fearful of the bloody nature of competitiveness between nations that the new imperialism had engendered. This interpretation of imperialism was possible mainly because the development of capitalism was extricated from the imperium. Indeed, the development of capital and its ideal agent, the individual, were pitted in Spencer’s corpus in an antithetical relationship with state power, as conjured up in his famous phrase (and work) as “Man versus the State”. Empire was therefore not mainly significant because of its effects on colonized societies, but because of its effects in distorting social and political life back in England. On the eve of the Boer War, when empire had once more made itself visible on the domestic frontier, Britain’s own future for Spencer looked likely to be one of increased “savagery”. In its totality, his age had bequeathed possible futures that were anything but “interesting”.²²

In Spencer’s corpus his anti-imperialism was a corollary of his anti-statism rather than a sustained set of political ideas and arguments relating to the nature and development of liberal imperialism. For Shyamji Krishnavarma, the Indian radical, it was precisely Spencer’s distrust of the state and the belief in the powers of the social order that had an interesting potential for a radical nationalist agenda. Krishnavarma singled out Spencer as particularly resonant: individualism rather than the “nascent socialism of Bentham and Mill” was more appropriate for programmatic politics of change since these doctrines were dependent on the will of the state.²³ For Krishnavarma radical political life in India could only be possible in dissonance with the state, since the recent history and presence of the state in India had led to colonization and cultural loss. Ever keen to define political boundaries, Krishnavarma arrived in London in 1897 with the explicit purpose of countering British imperialism through a relentless propaganda effort directed at its imperial centre. Born in the year of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, apart from a stint in Oxford, where he worked as Sanskrit assistant to the orientalist

²¹ Spencer, “Rebarbarization”, in *Facts and Comments*, 122–41.

²² Spencer, “Imperialism and Slavery” in *Facts and Comments*, 121.

²³ Yagnik, *Shyamji*, 104.

Monier Williams, Krishnavarma spent most of the second half of the nineteenth century in India.²⁴ Prior to his time at Oxford, he had become a formative figure in the establishment of the Hindu reform movement, the Arya Samaj, under its leader Dayanand Saraswati. As a proficient Sanskritist, he was also Saraswati's literary legate and looked after the highly influential press of the Arya Samaj. His chequered involvement with the Arya Samaj perhaps influenced Krishnavarma to view a reformed social order, rather than state-willed institutions, as the potential site for individual regeneration.

On his return from Oxford Krishnavarma had a career of limited success working with different princely state administrations. Realizing his ineffectuality as a colonial official, Krishnavarma moved to London and became a propagandist networking with Irish Home Rule ideologues, such as Michael Davitt, and supporting pan-Islamism and Egyptian nationalists, notably Moustafa Kemal Pasha.²⁵ Apart from editing the *Indian Sociologist* journal, both a rabble-rousing paper directed against British imperialism and Indian liberalism and also a tribute to Spencer, Krishnavarma did not otherwise use the pen as a sword. Instead, given his vast private means, he became a patron of revolutionary activities in London, Europe and India.

Krishnavarma's main form of political activity centred on creating counter-institutional sites to that of the British Empire and the colonial state in India. He set up India House in Highgate, a suburban hostel which was soon identified as a political hothouse where radical Indian students lived. These included Vinayak Savarkar, the proponent of *Hindutva* or Hindu revivalism, and the internationalist—"terrorist" Har Dayal. Krishnavarma extended his political patronage by instituting scholarships for Indian students in Britain with the aim of ending their dependence on colonial coffers. This was a counter-move to the prevalent tradition of Indian liberalism that was associated with the English-educated Indian elite. If British imperialism in its planetary expanse needed an international counter-node in its network, then equally Indian liberalism for Krishnavarma needed to be resisted. For Krishnavarma the "lived life of the Indian liberal" was odious in the way in which it had created a cultural servitude and, after the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, a political servitude to the British.²⁶ For Krishnavarma, who claimed to have coined the powerful nationalist term *swaraj* (self-rule), Indian liberals of the Dadabhai Naoroji

²⁴ Most of the biographical details here are from Yagnik, *Shyamji*.

²⁵ "An Egyptian Patriot and the Pan-Islamic Society", *Indian Sociologist*, 2, 8 (August 1906), 32.

²⁶ C. A. Bayly, "Liberalism at Large: Mazzini and Transformations in Indian Political Thought", *Tufts*, 6 April 2005; Yagnik, *Shyamji*, 20–25.

and Pherozeshah Mehta type were “soft” in their politics, primarily because he perceived them to be steeped in British institutions and culture.²⁷

Indeed, the term *swaraj* was simultaneously recognized as an attribute of the nation and yet it was open to a wider range of meanings. It emphasized the question of freedom, both in relation to the self (since the term incorporates the “self”—*swa*) and also that of the nation or homeland. Here Krishnavarma understood it as signifying “one’s own country” and saw at it as an equivalent to Home Rule. “The word ‘Swaraj’”, Krishnavarma expounded,

or correctly Svrajya, which is the Sanskrit equivalent for Home Rule, must therefore have been familiar . . . before Mr. Dadabhai used it in his Address . . ., etymologically speaking, Home, in the word Home-Rule, really means *one’s own* (Country, etc) and is practically the same as *svam* in Sanskrit, the Latin words *suum regnum* being literally in Sanskrit *svrajyam* i.e. one’s own rule—home rule.²⁸

So why, and what of, Spencer? In this world of secret societies, surveillance and radicalism what could a philosopher committed to organic and almost unconscious ideas of historical transformation mean? The potential of individual will detached from the state was irresistible to Krishnavarma, who had interpreted the nature of dominant Indian liberalism as primarily statist and hence oriented towards the colonial order. Equally, the idea of individual passive resistance, or what Spencer had called “voluntary outlawry”, acquired political significance and formed a critical departure in nationalist thought at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁹ Indeed, even the non-universalist aspect of Spencer’s sociology and anti-imperialism would have held no irony for Krishnavarma. This turn to the social and the individual, historicized as a collective spirituality and interpreted as something specifically Hindu, was elaborated by Krishnavarma’s closest political ally and friend, the “extremist” nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

NATURAL HISTORY OF HINDUISM AND A COLLECTIVE HISTORY OF THE SELF: TILAK’S *GITA*

Texts, as Quentin Skinner has forcefully argued, are political manoeuvres in two senses: one in which available conventions are redrawn and the reshaping of these conventions is more often than not an “ideological manoeuvre”, and another in which the contextual interrogation of those changed conventions

²⁷ “Home Rule is ‘SVARAJYA’”, *Indian Sociologist*, 3, 3 (March 1907), 11

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Yagnik, *Shyamji*, 104.

offers perspectives on the nature of political action itself.³⁰ The *Bhagavad-Gita*, one of the formative and popular texts of Hinduism and part of the epic *Mahabharata*, came under renewed scrutiny and evaluation throughout the late colonial period.³¹ The question of moral conflict is central to the *Gita*, which is essentially a text on the imperatives of individual action and freedom.³² The *Gita* addressed the question of the self and the world through the idea of individual conduct. As such, the debates about different interpretations of the *Gita* were essentially about the meanings and modes of self-realization.

Written in a direct engagement with Victorian liberalism and idealism (in both its German and British variants), it was Tilak's rendition of the *Gita* that made the clearest links between evolutionism and Hinduism.³³ More specifically, while offering a theory of social action, Tilak's *Gita* was also in a large part a critique of liberalism.³⁴ Like Krishnavarma, who approved of Tilak's Spencian *Gita*, Tilak critiqued the emphasis in liberal thought and utilitarianism in particular on "external" elements and institutions as preconditions for progress. Tilak's *Gita* as an exercise in interpretation was directed towards both a critique of elements of Western political theory and the existing versions of the *Gita*. Written during the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement from a prison cell in Rangoon, Tilak's *Gita* was received as a political text rather than a theological-religious one alone.³⁵ Translated from Sanskrit and published in Marathi in 1915, Tilak's *Gita* was immediately translated into other Indian vernaculars and given a short summary in English. His *Gita* is not so much an act of translation as it is an exegesis and a commentary on political and ethical philosophy. Tilak structured political thought under the categories of Hindu philosophy relating to action, the creation of the universe, spirituality, renunciation and devotionism, which preceded the actual translation of the *Gita*. Recast as a theory of a "will to action", his commentary had a profound effect on the reception and meaning of the *Gita* itself in that it is now predominantly understood, as Tilak propounded it, as a theory of individual action.

³⁰ James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Oxford, 1988), 2–15.

³¹ Other contemporary interpretations of the *Gita* include those by Vivekananda and the theosophist Annie Besant. The dates of its "original" composition vary from 1200 BC to AD 200.

³² S. Radhakrishnan, "The Theism of the BhagavadGita", in *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Delhi, 2006; first published London 1923), 519–80.

³³ B. G. Tilak, *Shrimad Bhagwatgeeta Rahasya* . . . Translated from Marathi to Hindi by Madhavrao Sapre (Pune, 1917; 3rd edn, Pune, 1919, used here).

³⁴ V. M. Joshi, *The Gist of the Gita-Rahasya* (Benaras, 1916).

³⁵ Joshi, *Gist*, 2.

To give a brief account here, Tilak in the main critiqued British liberalism and evolutionism for their emphasis on self-interest and the “will to live”. Equally he critiqued German philosophy for its emphasis on the “will to power”. Tilak disputed the claim that there were strong resemblances in his thought with Kantian metaphysics.³⁶ Instead, he sought analogies with ethical and evolutionary philosophy and was particularly sympathetic to the concerns expounded by the British idealist T. H. Green. While recent evaluations of Green have revised the view that collectivism was immanent in his thought, for Tilak it was precisely the potential of a presumed collective unconscious that needed to be rendered expressively conscious and this became one of the central tenets of his *Gita*.³⁷

Tilak criticized the utilitarian principle of pleasure maximization and particularly John Stuart Mill’s formulation for de-linking human intention from human action. Further, action and non-action in Western political ethics, according to Tilak, were premised on a consensus over the issue of the “greatest happiness for the greatest number”. According to him this liberal axiom was a contradiction in terms.³⁸ While liberal thinking engendered “self-interest”, according to Tilak “self-interest” was morally and practically unsustainable in the last instance primarily because it was contrary to the idea of “sympathy” that Tilak took to be central to human nature.³⁹ According to him both German and British systems of thought were inadequate in themselves since they focused primarily on a narrow conception of what the material world was and were therefore incapable of explaining and accounting for sustained ethical action or even the nature of contentment and happiness.

Yet this was not simply another orientalist instance to define the West and the East in terms of a binary opposition between the material and the spiritual. Instead, Tilak singled out Spencer’s evolutionary theory and Ernst Haeckel’s account of Darwin as particularly conducive to a re-examination of spirituality itself.⁴⁰ Singling out evolutionary thought’s concern with the “inner workings” (*antah karan*) of human nature as suggestive, Tilak argued that evolutionary thought was, nevertheless, divided on the question of the relation between

³⁶ Tilak, *Shrimad*, 18–19. On neo-Kantianism and positivism see Melissa Lane, “Positivism: Reactions and Developments”, in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2003), 321–42.

³⁷ Stefan Collini, “Hobhouse, Bosanquet and the State: Philosophical Idealism and Political Argument in England 1880–1918”, *Past and Present*, 72 (1976), 86–111.

³⁸ Tilak, *Shrimad*, 74–122.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 179–95.

individual and collective happiness and tended to pose a duality between the two.⁴¹ Tilak's emphasis on the "inner" refers more broadly to critiques of natural science that, as Melissa Lane has pointed out, cohered around issues of "consciousness and self-consciousness" either "soaring above" or "unearthing the unconscious" that lay behind or below the natural and phenomenal world.⁴²

Delving into various strands of natural philosophy and evolutionary theory, Tilak further classified Hindu philosophical tradition in the comparative context. Identifying the similarity between *Sankhya* philosophy and evolutionism, he argued that the key limits of these two systems was that they saw a duality between man and nature. For Tilak, however, nature was only made intelligible by human action.⁴³ Taking recourse to Vedantic thought instead, Tilak argued that the self and the material world/nature were tied in a constitutive and endless unity.⁴⁴ The Vedantic issue of the constitutive unity of the self and the universe opened the interpretative space for Tilak to argue that the *Gita* was a reconciliation of man and nature by means of individual ethical action. Nature for Tilak was the great unconscious, or, rather, nature was unaware of itself and it was only human action which clarified the place of nature.

Tilak sought to render spirituality less as an abstraction and more as an explanation and highlighted its role as the basis of action (*karma*). He argued that spirituality had been misunderstood as "other-worldly" and the fact the "inner self" could not be held to empirical scrutiny had further obfuscated the issue.⁴⁵ Tilak's *Gita* was pitched against the prevalent rendition of this text, deriving from the medieval commentator and philosopher Shankaracharya, who had emphasized *gyan* or knowledge for self-realization and liberation.

* * *

Tilak's main line of critique of Shankaracharya and other versions of the *Gita* lay in the idea that liberation (*moksha*) was the ultimate conception of freedom and the goal of human existence. The realization of knowledge led to ultimate freedom and its path of renunciation was critiqued as one leading to inaction. Instead, for Tilak, *moksha* or liberation meant a specific kind of freedom, namely a freedom from attachment. According to Tilak, the "Ideal Man" (*purushartha*) was to be realized through non-attachment to the fruits of action.⁴⁶ Instead of

⁴¹ Ibid, chaps. 4–9.

⁴² Lane, "Positivism".

⁴³ On Kant and Vedantic thought see Tilak, *Shrimad*, 200–17.

⁴⁴ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 524–39.

⁴⁵ Tilak, *Shrimad*, 198, 240–45.

⁴⁶ "Nishphal karm" (detached action) has become an axiomatic understanding of the *Gita*.

renunciation from, and negation of, the world of action, the message of the *Gita* according to Tilak was for the householder, not the renouncer, and it stood as a philosophy of action (*karma*) in this world. Imparting spirituality with a this-worldly meaning and force that framed human action, Tilak did not reject renunciation in its totality, but made it a parochial category of non-attachment to the effects of action. Tilak saw spirituality as a system of discrimination between right and wrong. The nature of moral conduct or right action had framed the basic question of the *Gita* itself, but by imputing to it a theory of action grounded in ethical spiritualism—an end unto itself and this-worldly—Tilak thus reconciled the long-standing debate of “means versus ends” that had shrouded the reception of the *Gita*. As a trenchant critique, he dismissed liberalism as a system of duty and obligation to institutions including the state, in which interest rather than ethical conduct had been given primacy. Instead, Tilak recast ethical action as an obligation to the self. Moreover, by linking action to the idea of freedom, the political implications of Tilak’s *Gita* were not entirely lost on his readers nor debunked as esoteric metaphysics. Tilak’s critiques became politically influential as a doctrine of a new kind of political Hinduism as it became salient for those who historicized and sought to naturalize Hinduism within the evolutionary framework.⁴⁷

HAR DAYAL’S EVOLUTION AND RADICAL INTERNATIONALISM: DISRUPTING THE SELF AND NATION

If textual reinterpretations created a new vocabulary of a political Hinduism that was grounded in a critique of liberalism, then introspective encounters with the self threw into sharp relief the exigencies of the search for a resolution to its moral dilemmas. Gandhi’s autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* is a paradigmatic example of the positioning of the self as a moral agent. The common ground between different critiques of liberalism lay in the subordination of the political to the moral. These Indian critiques of liberalism in general turned on anti-statism, the cult of the individual and the notion of social regeneration. The transformation of these three aspects of thought came to imply passive resistance to the state, new practices of the self and continuing debates around religion as the foundation of a reformed social order. I move now specifically to the issue of the practices of the self that became both a performative politics and a means for the constitution of nationalist personas. For both Har Dayal, the radical “terrorist”, and also for Gandhi, the “practice of the self” invoked ethical acts of self-definition rather than any subordination to the nation state—something

⁴⁷ Pramatha Nath Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1894); and Pramatha Nath Bose, *Swaraj Cultural or Political* (Calcutta, 1929).

that would explain the repeated frustration with Gandhi and Har Dayal in the nationalist script. Moreover, they both fashioned their own individualism in a confessional mode. While Gandhi is often seen to betray the nationalist cause at key moments, Har Dayal is difficult to domesticate within the unfolding rhythm of the Indian nation's narrative. Har Dayal's idea of the Indian nation was almost sacred to his selfhood; by the end of the First World War and the key moment in that history of the nation state, political nationalism had come increasingly to represent to him the horrors of human life.

Har Dayal and his thought both illustrate more directly the transnational or the international context of Indian nationalism. His intellectual biography represents a transnational life that intersected and engaged with the dramatic moments of the early twentieth century. He began his career as a radical nationalist, by the end of the First World War had become an international socialist and on the eve of his death and the Second World War he had focused on ideas and practices of what he called "self-culture" as an essential form of radical politics.⁴⁸ If anything, Har Dayal's is a biography of disruption. This disruption occurred both in the form of the life he lived and, more importantly, in the content of his political thought, which was at odds with the political history of the Indian nation. His works also suggest that there was less of a distance or disjunction between the national and the international than might first appear.⁴⁹

In the opening years of the twentieth century, Har Dayal renounced the well-trodden path of the Western-educated Indian elite. Following his acquaintance with Shyamji Krishnavarma and on the eve of his graduation, Har Dayal renounced his British government scholarship and his undergraduate studies at St John's College, Oxford.⁵⁰ His passionate denunciation of the "soft life" of the Indian liberal was initially to be authenticated through a conscious reworking of the self. Denial of pleasure and austerity in everyday life were seen as preconditions or sacrifices that were necessary for the deliverance of the Indian nation. This form of renunciation, then, constituted the primary act of seeking a harmonious relationship with the imagined nation and of causally tying one's individual fate to that of the nation. Declaring himself to be a "political missionary" and with Krishnavarma's help, Har Dayal formed the Deshbhakta Samaj (loosely

⁴⁸ Har Dayal, *Hints for Self-Culture* (London, 1934).

⁴⁹ Nationalist biographers such as Dharamvira dispute Har Dayal's internationalism and cosmopolitanism while others such as Emily C. Brown see him as a cultural nativist. Dharamvira, *Lala Har Dayal and Revolutionary Movements of His Times* (New Delhi, 1970); and Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (Tuscon, 1975).

⁵⁰ British Library, India Office Records (IOR), L/PJ/6/822, Files 2502–07.

translated as “patriots’ society”). As he put it, an “Oxford degree” was “no guarantee for political knowledge” and still later, when Indian radicals in Paris such as Madame Cama and Sardar Rana tried to persuade him of the vitality of the role of the intellectual, Har Dayal dismissed the claim that it was ideal or even adequate to “live like Comte, and Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill”.⁵¹

At the same time, during the tumultuous years of the Swadeshi (home industry) movement of 1905–8, Har Dayal wrote a series of articles in the Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi press relating the direct Spencerite problematic of education and historical transformation.⁵² Like Spencer, he thought that education was the central mode of progress. Propounding the necessity for historicist thinking, he refuted Gandhi’s view, that Western civilization was to be rejected in its totality, but identified Western education as the key impediment to progress. The role of education for Har Dayal was essential in creating the apposite subjects of modernity and in fostering individualism (*vyaktitav*). Yet Western education in India had done precisely the opposite. According to him, it had instead “broken the spirit, soul and creative powers” and had thus created only subjects.⁵³ For Spencer, as we have noted, imperialism created enslavement to the state. In Har Dayal’s rendering, the malign powers of the state in the colonial context were redoubled in that the state was not simply an impediment but one that was categorically defined by its alienation from the social and cultural fabric over which it ruled. Above all, rather than reading Spencer as a theory of progress or as a simple critique of the state, Har Dayal deployed Spencer’s teleology as a means of explaining how one society had come to be subjugated by another. Subordination, for Har Dayal, was not merely made possible by the institutions of the state and the realm of the political. The evolution of a peaceful and perfect (or capitalist and liberal) society seemed for Har Dayal no more than an interconnection of subjugation. Indeed, the problem for him was not “rebarbarization”, but the recognition that the empire in India had indeed evolved from a “militant” form to one that was peaceful. This peaceful form of empire was read as its more powerful form and one that had made its longevity inevitable and endless.

Transition both to political autonomy and to modernity in Har Dayal’s programmatic politics lay in the re-education of the self. In the initial years and through the Deshbhakta Samaj, Har Dayal’s aim was to create an avant-garde. He dismissed the idea of having “mass meetings” but decided that a set of “clever students, sons of landlords and sons of rich merchants”, would form

⁵¹ Letters from Har Dayal to Shyamji Krishnavarma, 28 August 1907, and to S. Rana, undated (1910), in *Letters of Lala Har Dayal*, ed. Dharamvira (Ambala, 1970), 45 and 91.

⁵² Har Dayal, *Amrit mein vish* ... (Calcutta, 1922); in English *Our Educational Problem* (Calcutta, 1922).

⁵³ Har Dayal, *Amrit mein vish* ..., 9–25, 24.

this cadre of change by replicating his own experience of renouncing British institutions.⁵⁴ During the Swadeshi era, Har Dayal had sought a deep connection between the re-education of his own self and that of the incipient Indian nation. Indeed, the nation was imagined as an outcome of a break from the past. Isolation and penance for Har Dayal became routes through which to search for an authentic cultural selfhood. However, for him as for other political ideologues and protagonists the end of the Swadeshi era also marked a period of deep reflection and a move away from the public realm of politics.⁵⁵

Emerging from a self-imposed isolation in Algiers and plunging anew into politics, Har Dayal moved away from the British imperial nexus, from India and London, and into Continental Europe and America. Labelled a “terrorist” by the imperial bureaucracy, by the mid-1910s he had founded the *Gadr* (“mutiny”) movement that privileged individual armed resistance against the empire. The enunciation of “anarchic individualism” came to centre Har Dayal’s political thought and practice. Ironically, and famously, by the end of the First World War Har Dayal came to be seen as a turncoat, since he had argued that rather than British imperialism, it was German Imperialism and other post-war imperialisms that posed greater dangers to India and the world in general.⁵⁶ Recognizing the strength of the British Empire, Har Dayal’s main argument for this rather curious change of position was that a “Pan Germanic mania” would rapidly “Balkanise” South Asia.⁵⁷ The deliverance of the Indian nation had, in the changed chessboard of the world after 1919, a better chance to come about under the British, though increasingly, for Har Dayal, political nationalism itself was not even a desirable agent of progress. Pouring out his despair, Har Dayal presciently observed that the twentieth century would see a bloodletting by nation states rather than a politics for emancipatory and radical progress. As he wrote to the American critic and his long-standing interlocutor Van Wyck Brooks, “It is rather disheartening to find the XX century opening on dismal nationalism ... What a contrast to the corresponding period of the XIX century.”⁵⁸ Har Dayal’s persistent and deep suspicion of the powers of the state, however, kept him from joining the fold of international Marxism. Instead, a highly localized form of political violence and resistance and the renovation of the individuated self

⁵⁴ Letter from Har Dayal to Kishen Dayal, 31 May 1907, IOR, L/PJ/6/822, Files 2502–07.

⁵⁵ I am thinking here of both Rabindra Nath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh. See Sugata Bose in this issue.

⁵⁶ Har Dayal, *Forty-Four Months in Germany and Turkey February 1915 to October 1918* (London, 1920).

⁵⁷ Har Dayal to Van Wyck Brooks, 14 October 1918, Van Wyck Brooks Collection, Anneberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania, Mss. Coll. 650, folder 717.

⁵⁸ Har Dayal to Van Wyck Brooks, 24 November 1914, *ibid.*

became key to his radical politics. As he put it, “men are the first instruments of reform”.⁵⁹

In the inter-war era, two strong elements can be identified in Har Dayal’s political thought and practice. First, he elaborated the idea of cultural nationalism and stressed a belief in internationalism.⁶⁰ Internationalism here had simultaneously two meanings: one that encompassed the transcendence of the nation and another more politically instrumental meaning in which a nation, in order to be a nation, had to be recognized by others as such. This politics of recognition by others as a nation, as David Armitage has recently argued, dates the idea of the “international” to the formation of America.⁶¹ It is precisely in this latter sense of recognition that Lajpat Rai, appropriating Har Dayal’s politics into the national narrative, declared that “India had entered the international era”.⁶²

For Har Dayal, though, the nation state was but one step away from the inevitable stage of what he called “one super state” and the community of “free-thinking” individuals that would inhabit the new world order.⁶³ In such an imagining of the world order, transition to or the arrival of the Indian nation was not the ultimate goal of radical politics or the goal of a collective history. Rather, Har Dayal retreated into a universal sociology that would be constituted through a new self: rational and rebellious. Contrary to other thinkers, Har Dayal thought that neither reason nor the self were pliant, peaceful or innate forces, but were to be realized through a violent interrogation and transgression of the present.⁶⁴

CODA: GANDHI’S RULE OF SELF

In the early 1930s the sometime trade unionist and socialist from Gujarat Indulal Yagnik wrote two biographies, one of Shyamji Krishnavarma and the other of Mohandas Gandhi. Today, in the changed landscape of postcolonial India, Shyamji Krishnavarma’s legacy is being increasingly appropriated into the pantheon of the history of political Hinduism or *Hindutva* and Gandhi has but an absent presence. However, in the violent din of contemporary *Hindutva*, one needs to ask what Yagnik saw in these two very different figures. Eager to form

⁵⁹ Har Dayal to Van Wyck Brooks, 30 September 1922, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Rather than a contradiction between cultural nationalism/nativism and internationalism/cosmopolitanism these are categories of mutual inflection.

⁶¹ David Armitage, “‘A New Vattel’: Bentham on Liberty, Sovereignty and the Law of Nations”, Harvard, 5 June 2006.

⁶² Lajpat Rai, *Young India* (Lahore, 1918), 183.

⁶³ Har Dayal to Van Wyck Brooks, 30 September 1922, Van Wyck Brooks Collection, University of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁴ Har Dayal, *Hints for Self-Culture*.

a set of alternative politics, Yagnik's simultaneous interest in Krishnavarma and Gandhi is not altogether arbitrary or one that only refers to creating hagiographies of the great sons of Gujarat. Indeed, he recognized both as contemporaneous critics of liberalism.

Gandhi's most significant political writing, the thin dialogic pamphlet *Hind Swaraj* written in 1908 on a ship journey back from London, was about rescuing the idea of self-rule or *swaraj* from both Krishnavarma and liberal nationalism. As Gandhi chided Krishnavarma and his ilk, "What is the good of Indian national spirit if they cannot protect themselves from Herbert Spencer?"⁶⁵ However, this rhetorical question was not merely a search for cultural authenticity, though almost all of Gandhi's commentators have tended to interpret him in this manner.⁶⁶ Gandhi's multiple reputations, as a Mahatma with the best of Machiavellian skills or a "traditionalist" eager to restore a Hindu civilization, indeed throw an almost inescapable shadow over any understanding of Gandhi. Ajay Skaria's thought-provoking article on Gandhi offers a novel set of interpretations of Gandhian politics as a critique of liberalism.⁶⁷ Premised on "distinctive Gandhian notions of equality and justice", the Mahatma challenged the liberal "partitioning" of the realm of the religious and the political and the public sphere. Embedded in this rendering of Gandhi and Gandhian politics is the idea of what Skaria refers to as the "experiencing subject" or the self, which so far from being merely epiphenomenal, was the premise on which Gandhi's thought and politics, to my mind, was based. In agreement with Skaria, my concern in the brief discussion here is with the particular production of the self that Gandhi sought in his politics of modernity.

The most striking element of *Hind Swaraj* is its departure from liberalism. And this takes the form of de-historicism. In short, it subordinates history to the creation of a new self. Whether it is in Gandhi's critique of Tilak's *Gita* or in the pithy axioms of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi abandons the evolutionist and historicist mode for the creation of the self.⁶⁸ As Yagnik notes rather plaintively in his biography, Gandhi's *ashrams* or abodes were marked by an absence of books. A new and unique moral and political language of the self was signified for Gandhi through radical techniques of the self. Though in disagreement with Tilak's *Gita* on the grounds that it propagated violence in the name of action, Gandhi shared the idea that spirituality, or what he often called "soul force", was a this-worldly

⁶⁵ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge, 1997), 28.

⁶⁶ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, 1967).

⁶⁷ Ajay Skaria, "Gandhi's Politics: Liberalism and the Question of the Ashram", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, 4 (Fall 2002), 955–86.

⁶⁸ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 28 January 1920, on a critique of Tilak's *Gita*.

power that was transformative of the self and the world. However, unlike in Tilak's view, this "soul force" was not embedded in the collective and repressed past but was to be constituted and realized anew through the rigours of self-construction. Further, political instrumentality and the realization of the nation state were subordinated to this new ethical self. As he noted, "the expulsion of the British" was not the "essence" of *swaraj* but rather "self-transformation" was. In a provocative vein, though, he consistently argued that if such a self-transformation had been possible under the British, it would be irrelevant whether or not Britain continued to rule over India.⁶⁹ He concluded that *swaraj* was "to be experienced by each one for himself". This self-constitution was not only to be experienced "internally", but it was also a non-sociological (in the Spencerian sense) programme for action. Highly individuated and internalized, this "governmentalisation" of the self centred on spirituality as a set of techniques for its attainment. Right conduct in its everyday enactment and "reason" that could be "spiritually experienced" was the basis of a highly disciplinarian idea of an ethical individuality. As a meditation on the practice of everyday living, *swaraj* and its techniques focused on morality, chastity, forgiveness and non-violence.⁷⁰ Indeed, rather than an emphasis on prevalent theories of will to action or power, technologies such as truthfulness or *ahimsa* were for Gandhi the will to self. Gandhi's repeated subordination of the political movement to the ethical self (and ethical community) is what has earned him his apparently contradictory representation as Mahatma/Machiavelli. In this sense, it is not surprising that by the 1940s and at the staging of the nation state Gandhi was seen as an ineffectual and isolated practitioner of politics.

Rather than causally and neatly related, these diverse strands of critiques of liberalism discussed above are in Skinner's sense "pointillist" in nature, highlighting the conceptual shifts on questions of the self, philosophical outlook and political action. The question of the self as an intentional subject and as an agent of and for historical transformation is a condition peculiar to modernity. Sovereignty over the self was not only a political demand, but an ethical necessity. While the self was emergent in liberal political thought in a dialectic of "Man versus the State" or "Man versus God" these debates instead opened broader questions of ethics as a form of an Indian critique of liberalism. For Tilak the self was armed by a collective unconscious which, to be made conscious, required a radical and ultimately hostile politics of action. Despite the differences between revolutionary politics and Gandhian politics there was a crucial resemblance

⁶⁹ Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 72–6.

⁷⁰ Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2000).

between the two in their critique of liberalism. While political autonomy was central for both Har Dayal and Gandhi, the political instruments of the nation state were not the telos of this revolutionizing of the self. Both Har Dayal and Gandhi saw the new disciplined self as exemplar, agent and metonym for the nation. While Gandhi's experiments and techniques constituted a self that existed over and above the nation, Har Dayal's idea of the self of violent reason and denunciation transcended the nation altogether.

THE SPIRIT AND FORM OF AN ETHICAL POLITY: A MEDITATION ON AUROBINDO'S THOUGHT*

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This article elucidates the meaning of Indian nationalism and its connection to religious universalism as a problem of ethics. It engages in that exercise of elucidation by interpreting a few of the key texts by Aurobindo Ghose on the relationship between ethics and politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Both secularist and subalternist histories have contributed to misunderstandings of Aurobindo's political thought and shown an inability to comprehend its ethical moorings. The specific failures in fathoming the depths of Aurobindo's thought are related to more general infirmities afflicting the history of political and economic ideas in colonial India. In exploring how best to achieve Indian unity, Aurobindo had shown that Indian nationalism was not condemned to pirating from the gallery of models of states crafted by the West. By reconceptualizing the link between religion and politics, this essay suggests a new way forward in Indian intellectual history.

“[L]ong after this controversy is hushed in silence”, Chitta Ranjan Das had said of Aurobindo Ghose during the Alipore bomb trial in 1909, “long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of the High Court of History.”¹

* An earlier version of this essay was given as the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Oration at the Centre for Human Values, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, on 12 August 2005.

¹ Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial* (Calcutta: Butterworth, 1922), 140–41. Chitta Ranjan Das served as Aurobindo Ghose's defence counsel in 1909. Das later rose to become the pre-eminent leader of the Indian nationalist movement between 1917 and 1925 and was given the honorific title *Deshbandhu* (“Friend of the Country”).

The future Deshbandhu's forensic skills contributed in no uncertain measure to Aurobindo's acquittal by Judge C. P. Beachcroft, who by a strange coincidence had read classics with the accused at King's College, Cambridge. Aurobindo Ghose had beaten Beachcroft to second place in an examination in Greek, but the broad-minded judge did not hold that against his prisoner. C. R. Das persuaded the court that a letter allegedly written to Aurobindo by his younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghose—presented by the prosecution as clinching evidence of a terrorist conspiracy—was nothing but a forgery, “as clumsy as those Piggott had got up to incriminate Parnell after the murder of Lord Cavendish in Phoenix Park”.² Sifting through Aurobindo's letters and essays, his counsel showed him to be motivated by the “lofty ideal of freedom” in the pursuit of which he had preached the doctrine of “not bombs, but suffering”.³

Acquitted by a British judge presiding over the trial at the sessions court, one would have thought that Aurobindo would be hardly in need of an argument to exonerate him before the High Court of History. He is certainly revered in popular memory as one of the iconic leaders of the great Swadeshi (“own country”) movement that swept Bengal a hundred years ago between 1905 and 1908. Yet half a century of indoctrination in the dulling ideology of statist secularism has led to profound misunderstandings of Aurobindo's political thought and an utter inability to comprehend its ethical moorings. Latter-day Bengali scholars of great distinction, even more so than his British prosecutor Eardley Norton, have provided sterile, literalist interpretations of Aurobindo's nationalism. The misappropriation of Aurobindo by the Hindu right has been facilitated by the secularists' abandonment of the domain of religion to the religious bigots. To a secularist historian like Sumit Sarkar the invocation to *sanatan dharma* by Aurobindo is deeply troubling and makes him implicitly, if not explicitly, the harbinger of communalism in the pejorative sense the term came to acquire some two decades after Aurobindo had retired from active political life.⁴ To an anti-secularist scholar like Ashis Nandy the “nationalist passions” of Aurobindo located in “a theory of transcendence” are mistakenly deemed to be too narrowly conceived compared to the broader humanism of the more universalist, civilizational discourses ascribed to Tagore and Gandhi.⁵ The specific failures in fathoming the depths of Aurobindo's thought are related to more general infirmities that have afflicted the history of political and economic

² P. C. Ray, *Life and Times of C. R. Das* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1927), 62.

³ Bose, *Alipore Bomb Trial*, 111.

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), 315–16.

⁵ Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

ideas in colonial India. Both Marxist and non-Marxist preoccupations with interest to the exclusion of sentiment have led, as Andrew Sartori puts it, to a “vacuum of ideological content”, while the tendency to view nationalist thought as derivative of European discourses has resulted in a “vacuum of native subjectivity”.⁶ Indian intellectual history needs to be rescued from this impoverished state.

Modern Indian nationalism, far from being exclusively derived from European discourses, drew significantly on rich legacies of precolonial patriotism and kept it alive through a constant process of creative innovation. Indians in the late nineteenth century were also intensely curious about social and political experiments elsewhere in the world. In order to imagine one’s own nation, as C. A. Bayly has contended, it was important to figure out how other nations were being imagined.⁷ In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth the Indian nation was very much in the process of its own making, with a variety of individuals, linguistic groups and religious communities seeking to contribute to imagining it into being. There were territorial as well as universalist aspects of this nation in formation, even though it is only the former that has been emphasized by theorists of the nation as “imagined community”.⁸ These theorists tracked the global dispersal, replication and piracy of the nation-state form from the West to the East, leaving out of account the multiple meanings of nationhood and alternative frameworks of states that were imagined in the colonized world of Asia and Africa. Indian anti-colonialism was nourished by many regional patriotisms, competing versions of nationalism and extraterritorial affinities of religiously informed universalisms. It is a travesty to reduce to the trope of piracy the engagement in colonial India with ideas circulating in contemporary Europe. The Indian intellectual deserves to be put on a par with the European thinker and, as Kris Manjappa argues, ought to be viewed “as engaging and revising through *phronesis*” the full range of Indian, European and in-between ideational traditions which he or she encountered.⁹ The varieties of liberalism in

⁶ Andrew Sartori, “The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904–1908”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23, 1 and 2 (2003), 271–85, 272.

⁷ C. A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and C. A. Bayly, “Liberalism at Large: Giuseppe Mazzini and Nineteenth Century Indian Thought”, Tufts University, 7 April 2005.

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁹ Kris Manjappa’s important doctoral research at Harvard University on intellectual encounters between Germany and India is based on this approach.

the nineteenth century and the multiple voices of Marxist internationalism of the post-World War I era are beginning to be studied in this new light. The Swadeshi conjuncture of the early twentieth century deserves the same sophisticated treatment in order to elucidate the meaning of nationalism and its connection to religious universalism as a problem of ethics.

This essay engages in that exercise of elucidation by interpreting a few of the key texts by Aurobindo on the relationship between ethics and politics. This interpretation owes a debt to an insight gleaned from Ranajit Guha's delicate reading of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim*. In putting moral sentiments back into the study of nationalism, Guha notices "a movement of individuation that ran parallel" to the mass campaigns of the nationalist era and suggests that the mass aspect was nourished by "the energies of such individuation". The young Subhas found in Vivekananda's maxim *aatmano mokshaartham jagaddhitaya [ca]* the central principle to which he could devote his whole being. "For your own salvation and for the service of humanity—that was to be life's goal", he wrote, adding that the service of humanity "included, of course, the service of one's country". The triad of *seva* (service), *shraddha* (respect) and *tyag* (sacrifice) would form the ethical bedrock of this existential dimension of nationalism.¹⁰

Aurobindo's biographer, Srinivasa Iyengar, regards some of his early poetical works, including *Urvashie*, *Love and Death* and *Perseus the Deliverer*, as indicative of an engagement with "the problem of service and sacrifice and of right aspiration and conduct".¹¹ Even though the young Aurobindo had tried to light new lamps for old through his powerful political journalism in the 1890s and nursed a desire to enter the fray of anti-colonial politics since 1902, the die had not yet been cast. The trials of becoming a nationalist had not yet been fully negotiated. The moment of individual commitment in Aurobindo's case coincided with the affront to the Bengali nation in the form of Curzon's partition.¹² In an intense letter to his wife in August 1905 he described himself to be seized of three great convictions—first, that all his worldly possessions belonged truly to God; second, that he wished to encounter God face to face; and third, that he viewed his country as the Mother whom he was determined to free from a demon's grasp through the application of his *brahmatej* (divine power).

¹⁰ Ranajit Guha, "Nationalism and the Trials of Becoming", *Oracle*, 24, 2 (August 2002), 1–20, 12, 15, 17–20.

¹¹ K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1945), 119.

¹² The Viceroy had divided this province, proud of its linguistic and cultural unity, largely along religious lines. The anti-partition agitation grew into the Swadeshi ("own country") movement with the goal of winning *swaraj* ("self-rule").

The world might consider these mad ideas, but he assured his wife that a mad man upon the fulfillment of his mission was usually acknowledged a great man.¹³

Aurobindo's *brahmatej* in the cause of the Mother was mostly on display in the editorials of *Bande Mataram*, the paper he jointly edited from July 1906 with the other intellectual giant of the Swadeshi era (1905 to 1908), Bepin Chandra Pal. The most important series of articles from Aurobindo's pen to appear in this paper were those on the doctrine of passive resistance published between 9 and 23 April 1907. He could see that organized national resistance to alien rule could take three possible forms. First, there could be passive resistance of the sort orchestrated by Charles Parnell in Ireland. Second, resistance might take the shape of "an untiring and implacable campaign of assassination and a confused welter of riots, strikes and agrarian risings" that had been witnessed in Russia. The third path for an oppressed nation was the time-honoured one of "armed revolt, which instead of bringing existing conditions to an end by making their continuance impossible sweeps them bodily out of existence". A subject nation had to make its choice by taking account of "the circumstances of its servitude" and Indian circumstances indicated passive resistance to be the correct path. While anticipating many elements of Mahatma Gandhi's methods, Aurobindo argued from a different ethical standpoint. He was certainly not prepared to regard other methods as "in all circumstances criminal and unjustified". "It is the common habit of established Governments and especially those which are themselves oppressors", he wrote, "to brand all violent methods in subject peoples and communities as criminal and wicked". The refusal to listen to "the cant of the oppressor" attempting to lay "a moral as well as a legal ban on any attempt to answer violence by violence" had the approval of "the general conscience of humanity". Passive resistance could turn into a battle in which the morality of war ruled supreme. In those situations to "shrink from bloodshed and violence" deserved "as severe a rebuke as Sri Krishna addressed to Arjuna".¹⁴

In spelling out the limits of passive resistance Aurobindo—for all his adoration of the Mother—made a few unfortunate, gendered remarks that were not unusual for the times, but nevertheless have a jarring quality. He was not in favour of "dwarfing national manhood" in the face of coercion as that would be a sin against "the divinity in our motherland". Passive resistance had to be "masculine, bold and ardent in its spirit" and capable of switching over to active resistance. He did not want to develop "a nation of women" who in his essentialized view knew "only how to suffer and not how to strike". Passive resistance was an exercise in "peaceful and self-contained *Brahmatej*". But, as "even the greatest

¹³ Ibid., 124–7.

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1948), 27–30.

Rishis of old could not, when the Rakshasas were fierce and determined, keep up the sacrifice without calling in the bow of the Kshatriya", that weapon had to be kept "ready for use, though in the background".¹⁵

In what way was the quality of patriotism in the Swadeshi conjuncture different from the "liberal" conjuncture that is often seen to have preceded it? It would be a mistake to imagine a complete break since ideas about a religion of humanity and the theme of Mazzinian suffering supplied connecting threads. But the Swadeshi era did offer a compelling and intellectually sophisticated critique of the abstract nature of late nineteenth-century liberal nationalism. In 1905 Bipin Pal wrote of the new patriotism in India, different from the period when Pym, Hampden, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth and Washington were "the models of young India". The old patriotism "panted for the realities of Europe and America only under an Indian name". "We loved the abstraction we called India", Pal wrote, "but, yes, we hated the thing that it actually was". But the new patriotism was based on "a love, as Rabindranath put it. . . for the muddy weed-entangled village lanes, the moss-covered stinking village ponds, and for the poor, the starved, the malaria-stricken peasant populations of the country, a love for its languages, its literatures, its philosophies, its religions; a love for its culture and civilization".¹⁶

One finds an echo of this sentiment in Aurobindo's essay "The Morality of Boycott", written for *Bande Mataram* but not actually published in it. He wrote lyrically of love of one's country and "the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom":

The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother-soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of the rivers that stream from Indian hills, in the hearing of Indian speech, music, poetry, in the familiar sights, sounds, habits, dress, manners of our Indian life, this is the physical root of that love. The pride in our past, the pain of our present, the passion for the future are its trunk and branches. Self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, great service, high endurance for the country are its fruit. And the sap which keeps it alive is the realization of the Motherhood of God in the country, the vision of the Mother, the knowledge of the Mother, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service of the Mother.

A deep affective bond with the motherland was, then, to replace the abstract nationalism of the preceding decades. But just as there were several strands within "liberal" thought,¹⁷ so too Swadeshi patriotism had a number of variants.

¹⁵ Ibid., 62, 65, 78.

¹⁶ Bipin Chandra Pal, "The New Patriotism", in *idem*, *Swadeshi and Swaraj (The Rise of New Patriotism)* (Calcutta: Yugayatri Prakashak, 1954), 17–20.

¹⁷ Biman Behari Majumdar, *History of Political Thought: From Rammohun to Dayananda* (1821–84), Volume I: Bengal (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934), 284–320.

Aurobindo's essay justifying the morality of boycott was written partly in response to "a poet of sweetness and love" who had deprecated boycott as "an act of hate". While wishing to discharge minds of hate, Aurobindo at this stage was prepared to see even hatred if it came "as a stimulus, as a means of awakening". As for violence, it was not reprehensible from the point of view of political morality. It had been "eschewed", "because it carried the battle on to a ground where we are comparatively weak, from a ground where we are strong". In different circumstances Indians might have followed the precedent set by the American War of Independence and, had they done so, "historians and moralists would have applauded, not censured". "The sword of the warrior", Aurobindo concluded, "is as necessary to the fulfilment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint".¹⁸

Until the end of 1907 Aurobindo's exhortations to the youth were balanced in his articles by the application of a razor-sharp intellect. Charged with sedition, he stepped down as principal of the Bengal National College with a parting advice to his students to serve the motherland: "Work that she may prosper, suffer that she may rejoice."¹⁹ While the sedition case was going on, Aurobindo wrote three important articles in *Bande Mataram* entitled "The Foundations of Sovereignty", "Sankharitola's Apologia" and "The Unities of Sankharitola" that were masterpieces of political polemic. Already in his pieces on passive resistance, he had identified the need for a central authority to guide the movement. He now answered those who contended that the diversity of races in India doomed the prospect of national unity. "One might just as well say", he wrote, "that different chemical elements cannot combine into a single substance as that different races cannot combine into a single nation".²⁰ His more nuanced studies on Indian unity belong, however, to a much later phase of his writing career.

In 1908 Aurobindo's rhetoric was elevated to an altogether different spiritual plane. In January of that year he spent a few days practising yoga under the direction of Vishnu Bhaskar Lele in Baroda. When he rose to speak before the Bombay National Union on 19 January 1908, "he seemed to the audience as one in the grip of a trance".²¹ Bengal had once judged all things through "the imperfect instrumentality of the intellect", but the work of "unaided intellect" was now done. "What is Nationalism?" he asked. "Nationalism", the answer came, "is not a mere political programme. Nationalism is a religion that has come from God. . . . Nationalism is immortal. . . . God cannot be killed. God cannot be sent to jail." The country could not be saved merely by boycott, national

¹⁸ Aurobindo, *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, 81, 83–5, 87–8.

¹⁹ *Speeches of Aurobindo Ghose* (Chandernagore: Prabartak Publications House, 1911), 7.

²⁰ Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo*, 149–50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

education or Swadeshi. In place of the pure intellect, the need of the hour was faith of which another name was selflessness. "This movement of nationalism", Aurobindo clarified, "is not guided by any self-interest, not at the heart of it . . . We are trying to live not for our own interests, but to work and die for others". The third name for faith and selflessness was courage which came not from being "a Nationalist in the European sense, meaning in a purely materialistic sense", but from a realization that "the three hundred millions of people in this country are God in the nation".²²

Aurobindo carried this message of the spirit from Bombay to Bengal, from Baruipur to Kishoreganj. He spoke of faith and the dispelling of illusion through suffering, but he was no traditionalist, which is why he is probably so misunderstood today by neo-traditionalists like Ashis Nandy. Speaking to the Palli Samiti of Kishoreganj, he accepted the virtues of village upliftment, but was not ensnared by the mirage of self-sufficient village communities. "The village must not in our new national life be isolated as well as self-sufficient", he advised, "but must feel itself bound up with the life of its neighbouring units, living with them in a common group for common purposes". The unity that he urged was not of opinion or speech or intellectual conviction. "Unity is of the heart", he was convinced, "and springs from love".²³

Aurobindo's spiritual fervour deepened further during his nearly year-long stay in Alipur jail during the bomb-case trial of late 1908 and early 1909. There he read the *Gita* and saw visions of Sri Krishna as his protector and guide. He gave a vivid description of his experiences in jail in his famous Uttarpara speech delivered immediately after his release from detention. It is a speech hugely misunderstood by historians thoroughly imbued with the secular ideology of the postcolonial Indian state. "I spoke once before with this force in me", Aurobindo declared near the conclusion of this speech,

and I said then that this movement is not a political movement and that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, faith; I say that it is the *Sanatana Dharma* which for us is nationalism.²⁴

Sumit Sarkar cites these lines disapprovingly in his book on the Swadeshi movement indicating an inversion from the cultivation of religion as "a means to the end of mass contact and stimulation of morale" to religion as "an end in itself". The implication here is that the instrumental use of religion for the purpose of mass nationalism can perhaps be condoned from the secular

²² *Speeches of Aurobindo Ghose*, 10–12, 15, 27, 35–9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 65, 70, 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

standpoint, but the protection of religion as a goal of the campaign for *swaraj*—an end sought by anti-colonial leaders from Aurobindo to Gandhi—cannot. Dipesh Chakrabarty has been right in pointing to “the remarkable failure of intellect” and, one might add, imagination not only in Sarkar’s book in particular, but in works by secularist historians in general, in dealing with the question of religion in public life.²⁵ Sarkar sees the Uttarpara speech as the product of a moment of “strain and frustration” without caring to delve into what Aurobindo might have meant by *sanatan dharma*.

The speeches Bepin Pal and Aurobindo Ghose gave in Uttarpara after their release from Buxar jail and Alipur jail respectively in 1909 were certainly different in tenor from Surendranath Banerjee’s Uttarpara speech on Mazzini in 1876. Both spoke of their realization in jail “of God within us all”. “I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas”, Aurobindo recalled, “and an atmosphere entirely foreign”. He had believed religion to be a delusion and when he first approached God he had “hardly had a living faith in Him”. But now he not only understood intellectually but realized what it was to “do work for Him without demand for fruit”. The *sanatan dharma* that Aurobindo invoked in his Uttarpara speech was no narrow or bigoted creed, but as large as “life itself”. It was that *dharma* that had been cherished in India for “the salvation of humanity”. India was rising again not “as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak”; she was rising “to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world”. “India has always existed for humanity and not for herself”, Aurobindo contended at Uttarpara, “and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great”.²⁶ The inversion of the humanistic aspiration in Hinduism and Islam alike to a parody called communalism is the signal achievement of our secularist historians, not of Aurobindo.

The relationship between the nationalism of the age and an eternal humanistic religion was articulated with even greater vigour in Aurobindo’s new journal *Karmayogin* in 1909. The ideal of the *karmayogin* was clearly stated to be “building up India for the sake of humanity”. Yet each nation had its character distinct from “the common nature of humanity”. India in the nineteenth century had been “imitative, self-forgetful, artificial”. In that situation the resistance of even “the conservative element in Hinduism, *tamasik* [dark], inert, ignorant, uncreative though it was”, prevented an even more thorough disintegration and gave some respite for the “national self to emerge and find itself”. Nationalism so far had been “a revolt against the tendency to shape ourselves into the mould of Europe”. But it was also necessary to guard “against any tendency to

²⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 April 1995, 256–80, 753.

²⁶ *Speeches of Aurobindo Ghose*, 86–7, 90–93, 100–1, 108.

cling to every detail that has been Indian”, for that had “not been the spirit of Hinduism in the past” and ought not to be in the future. In an essay entitled “The Doctrine of Sacrifice” Aurobindo warned that the “national ego may easily mean nothing more than collective selfishness”. The only remedy for that tempting evil was to “regard the nation as a necessary unit but no more in a common humanity”. Nationalism at its first stage makes stringent demands on the individual. But at the second stage “it should abate its demands . . . and should preserve itself in a Cosmopolitanism somewhat as the individual preserves itself in the family, the family in the class, the class in the nation, not destroying itself needlessly but recognizing a larger interest”.²⁷ Aurobindo spoke not only of the sacrifice of the individual, but also of the greatness of the individual. As his biographer puts it, “if all and sundry begin talking about ‘inner voices’ and proclaiming themselves to be agents of the Divine, ordinary life would grow quickly untenable”.²⁸ In Aurobindo’s view only that individual who had mastered the discipline of yoga could interpret and implement the divine will. “The greatness of individuals”, he concluded, “is the greatness of the eternal Energy within”.²⁹ “All great movements”, he believed, “wait for their Godsent leader”. In his farewell open letter to his countrymen in 1910 he restated once more the ideal Bengal had aspired to in the first decade of the twentieth century. “Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood”, he wrote in what he thought might be his last will and political testament, “and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind. But it is an unity of brothers, equals and freemen that we seek, not the unity of master and serf, of devourer and devoured”.³⁰

“And so”, Sumit Sarkar writes somewhat derisively, “the revolutionary leader becomes the yogi of Pondicherry”.³¹ Aurobindo may have retired from active participation in politics, but his days as a thinker on the problem of ethics and politics were far from over. In that respect the best was perhaps yet to come. On his forty-third birthday in 1914 Aurobindo launched a new journal called *Arya*, a philosophical review, which did not cease publication until 1921. The tainted history of European racism and totalitarianism has cast a cloud over the meaning of this term. In Aurobindo’s connotation the word had nothing to do with race. “Intrinsically”, Aurobindo explained, “in its most fundamental sense, *Arya* means an effort or an uprising and overcoming”.³² Much like the term *jihad*, therefore,

²⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1945), 6, 20–22, 26–7, 30–32.

²⁸ Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo*, 213.

²⁹ Aurobindo, *Ideal of the Karmayogin*, 61.

³⁰ *Speeches of Aurobindo Ghose*, 225, 231.

³¹ Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, 316.

³² Sri Aurobindo, *Views and Reviews* (Madras: Sri Aurobindo Library, 1946), 7.

also much maligned in the contemporary world, *arya* signified an aspiration and endeavour towards self-perfection and the surmounting of forces within and without that stood in the way of human advance. In the pages of the *Arya* for seven years Aurobindo wrote prolifically on philosophy, literature, art, culture, religion and politics. In a short sequence entitled “The Renaissance in India” he offered a clarification of his opinion on the place of religion in the public life of India. He noted that there was no real synonym for the word “religion” in Sanskrit. He ventured to suggest that the ethical malady in India was caused not by too much religion, but too little of it, in the most generous sense of the term. “The right remedy is”, he recommended, “not to belittle still farther the age-long ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense”.³³

The major sequence in *Arya* of the greatest relevance for students of cultural criticism, political thought and human values today is the one published under the title “The Defence of Indian Culture” between 1918 and 1921. One of its components, called “The Significance of Indian Art”, a scintillating essay on the aesthetic side of Indian civilization, anticipates Edward Said’s critique of orientalism by some sixty years.³⁴ More pertinent to our immediate concerns is another component, “The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity”, from which the title of this essay takes its inspiration. In it Aurobindo resoundingly rejected the charge that India had “always shown an incompetence for any free or sound political organisation”. A “summary reading of Indian history” that India was “socially marked by the despotism of the Brahmin theocracy” and “politically by an absolute monarchy of the oriental” had been “destroyed by a more careful and enlightened scholarship”. But the attempt by some Indian scholars to read back modern parliamentary democracy into India’s past Aurobindo considered to be “an ill-judged endeavour”. He recognized “a strong democratic element”, but “these features were of India’s own kind”. While Aurobindo’s treatise rehearses in some detail the history of Indian ethics of good governance, the normative lesson to be derived from it was clearly meant for the future. It was “perhaps for a future India”, Aurobindo modestly expressed a hope, “to found the status and action of the collective being of man on the realisation of the deeper spiritual truth”.³⁵

Aurobindo’s discourse began with a consideration of republican freedom in India’s ancient past which turned out to be deeper and more resilient than in

³³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1946), 81.

³⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art* (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953).

³⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1947), 3–5, 22.

either Greece or Rome. Even after the drift in India as elsewhere from republican towards monarchical forms, Indian monarchy was not “a personal despotism or an absolutist autocracy”. The power of the Indian king was balanced by a council as well as metropolitan and general assemblies which were “lesser co-partners with him in the exercise of sovereignty and administrative legislation and control”. The social hierarchy was not replicated in the political hierarchy and “all the four orders had their part in the common political rights of the citizen”. In theory women in ancient India were “not denied civic rights”, even though in practice, Aurobindo conceded, “this equality was rendered nugatory for all but a few by their social subordination to the male”. “A greater sovereign than the king was the Dharma”, which Aurobindo defined as “the religious, ethical, social, political, juridic and customary law organically governing the life of the people”. Secular authority was denied “any right of autocratic interference” with this *dharma*. The “subjection of the sovereign power to the Dharma was not an ideal theory inoperative in practice”. In practical terms it exercised a restraint on the king’s power of legislation. More importantly, the “religious liberties of the commons were assured” against infringement by secular authority. Powerful sovereigns like Asoka might have attempted to increase royal influence in this domain. But even Asoka’s edicts, Aurobindo felt, had “a recommendatory rather than an imperative character”. A sovereign aspiring to promote change in the area of religious beliefs or institutions had to abide by “the Indian principle of communal freedom” or make a reference to “a consultative assembly for deliberation, as was done in the famous Buddhist councils”. Whatever the sovereign’s personal predilections, “he was bound to respect and support in his public office all the recognised religions of the people with a certain measure of impartiality”. “Normally”, as a consequence, “there was no place in the Indian political system for religious oppression and intolerance and a settled State policy of that kind was unthinkable”.³⁶ It is odd that a set of restraints and responsibilities enjoining secular authority in an ethical Indian polity to respect religious freedom is today appropriated as one of the meanings of secularism alongside a contrary meaning of the separation of religion from politics.

There were further safeguards in the ancient Indian polity against the “autocratic freak”. Notwithstanding the “prestige attaching to the sovereign”, obedience to the king was no longer binding “if the king ceased to be the faithful executor of the Dharma”. In extreme cases of oppression “the right or even the duty of insurrection and regicide” was acknowledged. “Another more peaceful and more commonly exercised remedy”, Aurobindo noted, “was a threat of secession or exodus”. He cited a case of such a threat against an unpopular king in south India as late as the seventeenth century. What, then, was “the

³⁶ Ibid., 10–15, 42, 45, 47–8.

theory and principle” as well as “the actual constitution of the Indian polity”? It was “a complex of communal freedom and self-determination with a supreme coordinating authority, a sovereign person and body”, but “limited to its proper rights and functions”. The “economic and political aspects of the communal life” were “inextricably united” with “the religious, the ethical, the higher cultural aim of social existence”. To take *dharma* out of politics would have been to erode its ethical foundations. By not taking apart the yoke of *dharma*, Indian civilization had in Aurobindo’s view “evolved an admirable political system”, but “escaped at the same time the excess of the mechanizing turn which is the defect of the modern European state”.³⁷

The ancient Indian polity propounded an imperial idea of unity that was at sharp variance with “a mechanical western rule” that had “crushed out all the still existing communal or regional autonomies and substituted the dead unity of a machine”. Indian history did, of course, afford an instance of expansion or conquest that spread “the Buddhistic idea” and its associated thought and culture to the lands abutting the eastern Indian Ocean. “The ships that set out from both the eastern and western coast were not”, as Aurobindo correctly pointed out, “fleets of invaders missioned to annex those outlying countries to an Indian empire”. But he slipped inadvertently into the language of cultural imperialism when he described this as a movement of “exiles or adventurers carrying with them to yet uncultured peoples Indian religion, architecture, art, poetry, thought, life, manners”. But this slippage did not vitiate the main point that he wished to make about the imperial idea. “The idea of empire and even of world-empire was not absent from the Indian mind”, Aurobindo argued, “but its world was the Indian world and the object the founding of the imperial unity of its peoples”. It was this idea that animated efforts at unity through the ages of the Vedas, the Epics, the Mauryas, the Guptas, the Mughals and the Marathas until there came a final failure, after which the British imposed “a uniform subjection in place of the free unity of a free people”.³⁸

Aurobindo then touched upon “the secret of the difficulty in the problem of unifying ancient India”. It was that “the easy method of a centralized empire could not truly succeed in India”. The rishis from the Vedic age onwards, therefore, propounded “the ideal of the Chakravarti, a uniting imperial rule, uniting without destroying the autonomy of India’s many kingdoms and peoples, from sea to sea”. The *dharma* of a powerful king was to set up a suzerainty. The “full flowering” of this ideal Aurobindo found in “the great epics”. The *Mahabharata* narrates the legendary and quasi-historic pursuit of this ideal of empire which even “the turbulent Shishupala” is represented as accepting in his attendance at

³⁷ Ibid., 16–18, 34, 62.

³⁸ Ibid., 65–6, 75.

Yudhisthira's *dharmic* Rajasuya sacrifice. The *Ramayana* too presents "an idealized picture of such a Dharmarajya, a settled universal empire". It is, in Aurobindo's words, "not an autocratic despotism but a universal monarchy supported by a free assembly of the city and provinces and of all the classes that is held up as the ideal". The "ideal of conquest" is "not a destructive and predatory invasion", but "a sacrificial progression" aiming at "a strengthening adhesion to a suzerain power". According to this ideal, unification "ought not to be secured at the expense of the free life of the regional peoples or of the communal liberties and not therefore by a centralized monarchy or a rigidly unitarian imperial State". The closest Western analogy that Aurobindo could find for this conception was "a hegemony or a confederacy under an imperial head".³⁹

Aurobindo doubted whether this ideal was ever executed in practice with full success even though he regarded the empire created and re-created by the Mauryas, the Sungas, the Kanwas, the Andhras and the Guptas as "among the greatest constructed and maintained by the genius of the earth's great peoples". It contradicted "the hasty verdict" that denied India's ancient civilization "a strong practical genius or high political virtue". With the benefit of more recent historical evidence Aurobindo might have found that the actually existing empire in ancient India was not that far removed from the ideal as was commonly supposed in the early twentieth century. The Muslim conquest, in Aurobindo's temporal scheme, occurred at a moment when India "needed a breathing space to rejuvenate itself by transference from the Sanskrit to the popular tongues and the newly forming regional peoples". The early Muslim sovereigns generally respected this process of vernacularization so that, in Aurobindo's terms, "the Mussulman domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule". "The vast mass of the Mussulmans in the country were and are Indians by race", he wrote, "and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest". Aurobindo had no doubt that "the British is the first really continuous foreign rule that has dominated India".⁴⁰

The Muslim conquest did not, therefore, introduce the difficulty of "subjection to a foreign rule", but it did pose a challenge of "the struggle between two civilizations". Aurobindo could see that there were "two conceivable solutions" to this problem: one, "the rise of a greater spiritual principle", or two, "a political patriotism surmounting the religious struggle". Akbar tried the first from the Muslim side, but his religion was too intellectual to receive "the assent from the strongly religious mind of the two communities". Nanak tried it from the other

³⁹ Ibid., 72, 76–8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 78–80, 86–7.

side, but his religion, “universal in principle, became a sect in practice”. Akbar also fostered a common political patriotism, but, in Aurobindo’s estimation, “the living assent of the people was needed” in the creation of “a united imperial India” beyond the administrative talent of nobles from both religious communities. The Mughal Empire was, in Aurobindo’s very positive assessment,

a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb’s fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval or contemporary European kingdom or empire and India under its rule stood high in military and political strength, economic opulence and the brilliance of its art and culture.

But it eventually disintegrated because, in Aurobindo’s view, “a military and administrative centralized empire could not effect India’s living political unity”. Here the sage from Pondicherry was overestimating the Mughal tendency towards military-administrative centralization, the best new research having suggested that the Mughal emperor sought no more than an overarching suzerainty that was India’s imperial ideal. But he was closer to the mark in presaging at least in part the revisionist historiography of the eighteenth century when he wrote that “although a new life seemed about to rise in the regional peoples, the chance was cut short by the intrusion of the European nations”.⁴¹

Aurobindo noted two final creative attempts by “the Indian political mind” in the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth. He interpreted the Maratha revival crafted by Ramdas and Shivaji as “an attempt to restore what could still be understood or remembered of the ancient form and spirit”. But the Peshwas succeeded in setting up nothing more than “a military and political confederacy”. Their imperial ambition floundered because it was “inspired by a regional patriotism that failed to enlarge itself beyond its own limits”. The second attempt by the Sikh Khalsa, despite its originality, “achieved intensity but no power of expansion”. After that came “a temporary end to all political initiative and creation”. “The lifeless attempt of the last generation”, Aurobindo concluded, “to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the West has been no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people”.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 88–9.

⁴² Ibid., 90–91. In the late seventeenth century Ramdas’s philosophy of regional patriotism and Shivaji’s statecraft had formed the basis of a Maratha *swarajya* (“independent kingdom”). The Marathas emerged in the eighteenth century as a strong regional power in western India led by the Peshwas and seemed the most likely inheritors of the Mughal imperial mantle. The Sikh Khalsa (literally, “the pure”) had established a powerful regional kingdom in the Punjab.

By the time Aurobindo completed his *arya* on Indian political ethics in 1921, a new God-sent leader had arrived on the scene to take charge of a new phase of Indian mass nationalism. Aurobindo's doctrine of sacrifice contributed to the recruitment of a young firebrand to Mahatma Gandhi's movement. "The illustrious example of Arabindo Ghosh looms large before my vision", Subhas Chandra Bose wrote to his elder brother Sarat as he prepared to resign from the Indian Civil Service in 1921. "I feel that I am ready to make the sacrifice which that example demands of me." Subhas Bose comments in his autobiography that "it was widely believed about this time" that Aurobindo "would soon return to active political life".⁴³ But Aurobindo's political work was done and the baton had been handed over. The year 1921, not 1910, marks the close of Aurobindo's career in inspiring the spirit and fashioning the form of an ethical polity. He had done his bit as a great individual in contributing to the dynamics that, in Ranajit Guha's words, "made dignity and self-respect the very condition of Indian nationalism".⁴⁴ But he had done more. He had shown that in the domain of creating a state Indian nationalism was not condemned to pirating from the gallery of models crafted by the West.⁴⁵ The imitative fidelity of the Nehruvian moment of arrival has been "no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people". The alternatives that lost out in that battle for power at the helm of a centralized state were represented not just by Gandhi or even Tagore, but a broad spectrum of moral personalities who had adopted nationalism as the religion of the age.

Although Aurobindo believed that night had descended on Indian political creativity under colonial rule, he could still see "amid all the mist of confusion" the possibility of "a new twilight, not of an evening, but a morning Yuga-sandhya". As the world stands at the threshold of a new dawn in the realm of political thought, if not political practice, it may not be inappropriate to recall Aurobindo's words of hope: "India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples."⁴⁶

⁴³ Sisir K. Bose and Sugata Bose (eds.), *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Collected Works, Volume 1: An Indian Pilgrim* (Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1997), 112.

⁴⁴ Guha, "Nationalism", 20.

⁴⁵ This point is conceded a little too easily in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1–7.

⁴⁶ Aurobindo, *Spirit and Form*, 91.

GEOGRAPHIES OF SUBJECTIVITY, PAN-ISLAM AND MUSLIM SEPARATISM: MUHAMMAD IQBAL AND SELFHOOD

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This essay focuses on the oppositional politics expressed in the historical geography of the Persian and Urdu poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), showing how it emerges from, and breaks with, Urdu and Persian travelogues and poetry of the nineteenth century. It explores the complex relationships between the politics of Muslim separatism in South Asia and European imperialist discourses. There are two defining tensions within this politics. The first is between territorial nationalism and the global imaginings of religious identity, and the second is between the homogenizing imperatives of nationalism and the subjectivity of individual selfhood. These tensions are reflected in the composite geography of Iqbal's work, which contains three elements: a sacred space, a political territoriality and the interiority of subjectivity. But these elements are in conflict with each other; in particular, the space of interiority in his poetry conflicts with the realm of politics in the external world.

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the complex relationships between the oppositional politics of Muslim separatism in South Asian and European imperialist discourses. It argues that there are two defining tensions within this politics. The first is between territorial nationalism and the global imaginings of religious identity within its assertion of collective identity, and the second is between the homogenizing imperatives of nationalism and the subjectivity of individual selfhood.

The focus here is on the oppositional politics articulated in the historical geography of Muhammad Iqbal's (1877–1938) Persian and Urdu poetry. Iqbal is best known as a poet, thinker and spokesperson for South Asian Muslim separatism.¹ There are three elements in his composite geography: a sacred space, a political territoriality and the interiority of subjectivity. Iqbal narrativizes space

¹ For biographical information see Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), chap. 1.

in multifarious ways in order to ground an alternative planetary consciousness to that centred on the European metropolis.² His geography also emerges from, and breaks with, Urdu and Persian travelogues and poetry of the nineteenth century. But his historical geography is unstable, because the space of interiority it expresses sits uneasily with the realm of politics in the external world. Moreover, this politics is itself made possible through the tension between separatist nationalism and pan-Islam.

SACRED GEOGRAPHIES AND THE MOBILITY OF TRAVEL

Scholars have shown how European imperialism was a geographical project, which produced an image of the world centred on the metropolis.³ In addition, Mary Louise Pratt has outlined how travel literature produced a European planetary consciousness, encoding and legitimizing aspirations of empire.⁴ Others have stressed how many of the significant literary works of the period from 1770 to 1830, described as the “age of the exploration narrative”, were inspired by the printed texts of explorers.⁵ The cross-fertilization between travelogues, exploration narratives and works of literature (especially novels) was exemplified by the popularity of the adventure narrative and romance quest between 1880 and 1920, at the height of British imperial power,⁶ and was significant in formulating a geopolitical imagination of nineteenth-century empire.⁷

However, scholars have not paid enough attention to countervailing historical geographies produced in non-European traditions of thought in the nineteenth

² For the general implications of paying attention to the narrativizing of space see Welsey A. Kort, “‘Religion and Literature’ in Postmodernist Contexts”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religions*, 58, 4 (Winter 1990), 575–88, 581.

³ Brian Hudson, “The New Geography and the New Imperialism: 1870–1914”, *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 9, 2 (1977), 12–19; Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, eds., *Geography and Empire* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994); and Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Michael Heffernan, eds., *Geography and Imperialism 1820–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4–5.

⁵ Tim Fulford and Carol Bolton, eds., *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion 1770–1835*, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), 1: xiii–xiv.

⁶ See Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling, and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London and Henley, 1980).

⁷ Fulford and Bolton, *Travels, Explorations and Empires*, xxviii; Green, *Dreams of Adventure*, 269–70.

and twentieth centuries.⁸ In nineteenth-century travelogues by Indian authors, there are hints of a sacred geography at odds with the eurocentric geography these writers otherwise internalize. The struggle between a sacred geography, and an externally imposed colonial, Western-oriented one, is especially apparent in Mohan Lal's *Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan, and Turkistan, to Balk, Bokhara, and Herat; and a visit to Great Britain and Germany* (1846). Lal commenced his travels in December 1831 as Alexander Burnes's munshi, and in his account he repeatedly refers to or describes sites of religious or spiritual significance. His employer, Alexander Burnes, makes no mention of these sites in his parallel *Travels into Bokhara* (1834). For example, Lal describes "a religious place of the Hindus", where there is a "sacred pond", in the vicinity of the salt mines at Pind Dadan Khan. Burnes only describes salt mines, not a religious site.⁹ Lal later refers to the tomb of Cheragh Shah, and the temple of Gorakh Nath, neither of which Burnes mentions.¹⁰ As they travel through Central Asia and Afghanistan, Lal mediates his geographical account through Shi'i legends and traditions, noting the locations of important events in Shi'i religious history.¹¹ Read alongside the lack of such a geography in Burnes, then, Lal's sacred geography is especially apparent. However, Lal also lays stress on Greek classical geography. He notes localities Alexander passed through in ancient times.¹² He often gives the ancient Greek names for rivers and cities, alongside their current names.¹³ In this, there is an overlap between Lal and Burnes, who on the first page of his *Travels* cites as one of his reasons for travelling the desire to "visit the conquests of Alexander".¹⁴ Throughout his journey Burnes searches for an identity between "the topography" of Alexander's route and his own.¹⁵ There are thus at least two geographies in Lal's *Travels*, one centred on Hindu and Muslim sites of sacred significance, and another on Burnes's classical Greek

⁸ But see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) chap. 8.

⁹ Munshi Mohan Lal, *Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan, and Turkistan, to Balk, Bokhara, and Herat; and a visit to Great Britain and Germany* (London: W. H. M. Allen, 1846), 25–6; Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara; Being the Account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary, and Persia; also, Narrative of a Voyage on the Indus, from the Sea to Lahore, with Presents from the King of Great Britain; Performed under the Orders of the Supreme Government of India, in the Years 1831, 1832, and 1833* (London: John Murray, 1834), 50–51.

¹⁰ Lal, *Travels*, 33, 53, 63–4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 191, 202, 209, 285.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61, 86, 190, 200–1, 263, 365–6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8, 109, 115, 366, 383.

¹⁴ Burnes, *Travels*, ix.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, especially 6–8.

geography, which renders the contemporary geography of the territories they travel through of secondary importance.

Other Indian travelogues also expressed hints of sacred geography. Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, who commenced his journey to Britain and Ireland in February 1799, foregrounds his Shi'i identity in the Ottoman provinces of the Middle East, often in relation to sacred sites. His travelogue contains accounts of *zīyāret* (visits to shrines) alongside the account of his travels to Europe.¹⁶ But his account also exhibits a sense of growing inferiority as he travels to Britain, so that its geography is centred on the latter. A simultaneous devaluation of India and valorization of Britain occurs when Mirza Abu Taleb describes the beauties of Phoenix Park in Dublin, adding that its attractions help him to understand the justness of the British desire to return home in spite of their status (*jāh va bazurgī*) in India.¹⁷ This is the reverse of his own changing evaluations as he travels. He begins his journey with a sense of Calcutta as a great city but ends with a sense of its inferiority.¹⁸

Similarly, Sayyid Ahmad Khan also notes sites of sacred significance in his travels to London in 1869.¹⁹ But again, the dominant sense of geography here is centred on Britain's power. The devaluing of the cities and practices of India by continual reference to European cities and monuments is especially evident in his travelogue. The only positive evaluation he offers of an Indian city (in this case Bombay) is because of its approximation to an English city.²⁰ His self-devaluation is such that he argues that Hindustanis as a whole are like a dirty and savage animal (*meile aur vehshī jānvar*) in relation to the English, who are compared to a worthy and beautiful man (*lāi'q aur khūbshūrat ādmī*).²¹

Iqbal's poetry, on the other hand, tries to recentre a global geography on the *hijāz* as a sacred space in Arabia.²² He imaginatively creates links between geographical features in diverse continents through that space. This goes hand

¹⁶ Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, *Masīri tālibī yā safar nāma-ye Mīrzā Abū Tālib Khān*, ed. Mirza Hasein Ali and Mir Qudrat Ali (Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1812), 708–15. This and all other translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

¹⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹⁸ Ibid., 64–5.

¹⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Musāfirān-e landan*, ed. Sheikh Muhammad Ismail Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, c. 1960), 90–91, 100.

²⁰ Ibid., 48–9. See also 144 for his devaluation of the Red Fort at Delhi in relation to Versailles, 131–2 for how diwali lights and the treasures of the richest Hindustanis cannot compare to the street lighting and shops in Marseilles, 152 on how chandni chowk cannot compare with the shops of Paris, and 167 on his hotel rooms in Bristol being superior to the rooms in a nawab's or rajah's palace.

²¹ Ibid., p. 184.

²² The *hijāz* refers to the north-western part of the Arabian peninsula as the birthplace of Islam and for Muslims also therefore its spiritual centre.

in hand with an attempt at a self-empowering geography of subjectivity (for which, see below). Thus, in the second couplet of the poem “Kinār-e rāwī” (“The Banks of the River Ravi”, 1905)²³ the poet connects the sound produced by the flowing of the river in the Punjab with the sacred space of the Ka’ba in Arabia. The poet’s globalizing reverie at the banks of the river transforms the world, in his imagination, into the precincts of a sacred space. Similarly, the circular geography in the poem “•iqilliyâ” (“Sicily”, 1908) connects Sicily with the ḥijāz in the first couplet, and with India in the final couplet.²⁴ In “Masjid-e Qurtabâ” (“The Mosque of Cordoba”, 1936), a specific location is again globalized, with the mosque at Cordoba serving as a locus for imagining a global community of Muslims.²⁵ Andalusia is linked with the Ka’ba, and also with Yemen and the ḥijāz in general, through the imagery of love poetry and the image of perfume being carried on a breeze.²⁶ The title of Iqbal’s final volume of poetry, *Armaghān-e ḥijāz* (“The Gift of the Ḥijāz, 1936) underlines his sense of the ḥijāz as the spiritual and material centre of Islam.²⁷

Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht have argued that sacred space must be understood as a structure of limitation and closure.²⁸ However, in the case of Iqbal’s sacred geography, what is significant is its malleability, which enables linkages to be imagined between multiple locations. Here, then, the sacredness of place puts into play a mobility of boundaries and spatial relationships, rather than closing them off. There are other points of instability in this sacred geography, which, at one level at least, are key to its imaginative efficacy. First, while Schimmel argues that Iqbal places the Arabian homeland of Islam at the centre of his philosophical poetry,²⁹ what is key to his conception of Islam is that it transcends its geographical origins to become trans-ethnic and not the preserve of Arabs alone.³⁰ The symbolic and sacred importance of the ḥijāz as a geographical trope is at odds with the specificity of its location. There are two

²³ Muhammad Iqbal, “Kinār-e rāwī”, in *idem*, *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū* (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam & Sons, 1973), 94–5, couplet 2.

²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, “•Siqilliyâ”, in *idem*, *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū*, 133–4, couplets 1 and 15.

²⁵ Iqbal, “Masjid-e Qurtabâ”, in *idem*, *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū*, 385–93, stanza 4, couplet 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, stanza 6, couplets 7–8.

²⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, “Sacred Geography in Islam”, in Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, eds., *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 163–75, 168.

²⁸ Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, “The Politics of Sacred Place: Jerusalem’s Temple Mount/al-haram al-sharif”, in *ibid.*, 21–61, 27.

²⁹ Schimmel, “Sacred Geography in Islam”, 164, 166.

³⁰ I have discussed this in “Pan-Islam and ‘Deracialisation’ in Iqbal’s Thought” in Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 304–26.

meanings to Iqbal's sacred geography, then. One is the sacred luminosity of the ḥijāz and the other is its historically accidental nature as a religious location, which is transcended by the global, post-ethnic, nature of Islam.

Second, the malleability of this sacred geography is evident in its configuration with the mobility of travel in Iqbal's work. Schimmel has pointed to the significance of the title of Iqbal's first collection of poems, *Bāng-e darā* (The Sound of the Caravan Bell, 1922) as indicating the desire to return to the central sanctuary of Mecca. But in many ways, what is equally important about the aesthetics of travel in Iqbal's sacred geography is that the ḥijāz is a point of departure. Elsewhere I have examined in more detail the aesthetic of travel in Iqbal's work.³¹ The role of travel in the rise and fall of Islam was also key to the nineteenth-century epic poem by Altaf Husain Hali, *Musaddas madd o jazr-e islām* (On the Flow and Ebb of Islam, 1879), and, as such, Iqbal's focus on a geography of travel in his work also needs to be briefly read in terms of the impact of Hali's poem.

The imbrication of travel with historical progress and decline in the *Musaddas* is expressed by Hali's sense that the Arabs of early Islam were distinguished by their readiness to travel and explore. They are described as internalizing their migrant mode of life, so that "they reckoned their homeland and travel [*watan aur safar*] as the same".³² For Hali one of the achievements of the early Islamic conquests was the construction of roads, so that not only were Arabs intrepid travellers, they also made travel easy for others.³³ The eagerness to travel which distinguished the early Islamic world is contrasted to the present disinclination of Indian Muslims to do so.³⁴ There is an implied link between the status of Muslims as a subject population and their indifference to travel. Hali also sees travel as one of the ways of verifying the existence of things mentioned in books and, more importantly, of learning how to distinguish between legendary place and geographical fact, so that there is also an implied connection between the Muslim community's disinclination to travel and its ineptitude in "scientific" habits of observation and verification.³⁵

The link between the readiness to travel lightly and a possible regeneration of Islam is made clear in Iqbal's "Javāb-e Shikvā" (Answer to the Complaint), when God is represented as saying that "Your caravan will never be laid waste

³¹ See my forthcoming *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru, Iqbal* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³² Altaf Husain Hali, *Musaddas madd o jazr-e islām*, ed. Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; first published 1879), 130–31, verse 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, 130–31, verse 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 202–3, 204–5, 148–9, verses 283, 285, 125–6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 148–9, verse 126.

[*vīrān*]/You have no baggage apart from the caravan bell".³⁶ But in many ways, Iqbal expands on this aesthetic of travel, crucially so, by celebrating it as a mode of being, worthy in itself. This is clear in a number of his key Urdu poems, such as "Khizr-e rāh" (Khizr on the path),³⁷ and his Persian epic poem, the *Javīd Nāma* (Book of Eternity) (1932), which is structured around the poet's imaginary journey through the cosmos. In the philosophical and poetic world of this text, perpetual travel is both something to aim for and a necessary metaphysical and ontological condition. In the transfiguring vision enacted in the poem, the entire universe is seen to be travelling, so that Tipu Sultan's missive (*paighām*) to the poet includes the exhortation to see that the highways (*jādahā*) are themselves like travellers (*rahravān*) on a journey (*safār*). He goes on to say, "The caravan and the camels and the desert and the palm-trees/whatever you see weeps [*nālīd*] for the pain of parting [*dard-e rahīl*]".³⁸ What is important here is that Iqbal's aesthetic of the mobility of travel grounds the malleability of his sacred geography. Both, however, are incompatible with the imperative of nationalist geography to fix a sense of belonging within a circumscribed territory. This becomes especially evident in Iqbal's articulation of a global geography of pan-Islam.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES

The tensions between travel, nationalist geography and a pan-Islamic geography are evident in the relationship between two of Iqbal's best-known poems, "Tarānā-e hindī" ("The Song [Anthem] of India", 1904) and "Tarānā-e millī" ("The Song [Anthem] of the Muslim Community", composed 1910). Both poems appeared in *Bāng-e darā*.³⁹ They are clearly meant to be read as a pair. The second poem recalls the first through its title; it is also composed in the same metre and rhyme scheme (*muzarī*).⁴⁰ In both poems the poet refers to himself in the last couplet, in a style reminiscent of the ghazal form. Both also express a strong sense of the passing of time, in part evoked by the flow of

³⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, "Javāb-e Shikvā", in *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū*, 199–208, verse 28.

³⁷ For which see Muhammad Iqbal, "Khizr-e rāh", in *idem*, *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū*, 255–76.

³⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *Javīd Nāma* (1932) in *Kullīyāt-e Fārsī* (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam & Sons, 1985), 59/5, hereafter *JN*. References are given as page number followed by couplet number, separated by a stroke—the page reference here is to the separate pagination of the poem which begins on 589. For an English translation see *Iqbal's Javid Nameh*, transl. A. J. Arberry (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), hereafter Arberry. For a translation of these verses see 133/3393–6 (that is, page 52, line 965).

³⁹ For the text of these poems, see *Kullīyāt-e Iqbāl Urdū*, 83 and 159 respectively.

⁴⁰ This is the most common metre in Urdu poetry. There are fourteen syllables per line, arranged in this pattern: -u/-u-u/-u/-u-. The common metre suits the popular nature of these poems. The regular pattern of alternating long and short syllables, which is reversed only in the middle, accounts for the measured pace of both poems.

rivers, in one case the waters of the River Ganges and in the other the River Tigris. But both poems also recall each other because of the way the poet uses a roll-call of place names to evoke history (Greece, Egypt, Byzantium, China, Arabia, India, Andalusia). Time is converted into space through the list of place names, so that the poems strive to create a cartographic image for their readers suspended in time, rather than a narrative with connectives between succeeding events. These poems, as a single aesthetic unit, create a simultaneity in which both exist side by side within the same narration of space.

Thus the two poems are inextricably linked through their mutual opposition. This needs to be read in terms of the central role pan-Islam played in Indian Muslim separatism. Scholars have pointed to how the Muslim League tried to form an all-India Muslim constituency by playing a pan-Islamic card to bolster the status of Indian Muslims as a minority.⁴¹ For a time, though, this process was usurped by the Khilafat movement, which pushed the League to the periphery of significant politics. As Gail Minault has argued, it was in the Khilafat movement that a pan-Indian Muslim constituency was formed through the use of pan-Islamic symbols.⁴² There were also earlier signs that this strategy was emerging in the aftermath of the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911. This was clear in the reactions to Montagu's speech in the House of Commons of 25 April 1919, in which he insisted that it was a "mistake to talk of the Mahomedans of India as though they were a homogenous nationality. The Mahomedans of Eastern Bengal and the Hindus had little or no relation with those outside Bengal". The secretary to the Muslim League responded to this statement by describing it as an attack on "the unity of Muslims all over India, not to say all over the world, on the basis of religion, of political rights and social homogeneity".⁴³ In this rhetoric, the unity of Muslims within a heterogeneous India was based on a putative global unity of Muslims; the one necessarily implied and secured the other.

However, pan-Islam was also an ideology that defined itself in opposition to the European ideology of nationalism. This is made clear in the speech by

⁴¹ Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 306.

⁴² Ibid., 214. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 208, 211–12.

⁴³ All India Muslim League papers, Vol. 91: Council Meetings, 1912, circular letter of Secretary, 27 April 1912, which cites the passage from Montagu's speech. See also the resolution passed by the Punjab Muslim League to the effect that this speech represented "an unwarranted departure from a recognised principle of Imperial Indian policy which has hitherto accepted all Indian Muslims, irrespective of locality and origin, as constituting one community", and that the interests of Punjabi Muslims are identical to those of Bengali Muslims (Resolution enclosed in circular letter of Secretary, All India Muslim League, 8 May 1912).

Afghani in the *Jāwīd Nāma*,⁴⁴ discussed below. The predominant theme in Afghani's discourse is the incompatibility between the rival ideologies of pan-Islam and the European notion of nationalism. This concern with nationalism reflects the increasing threat that it posed to pan-Islam in the period between the breakdown of the Khilafat movement and the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴⁵ It was this period that saw the laying of the foundations of a novel state system in the Middle East that reorganized existing forms of association and solidarity, and transformed the focus of political vocabularies which had their roots in more traditional discourses.⁴⁶ While it is now clear that pan-Islam cannot mount any serious challenge to the existing state structure in the Middle East,⁴⁷ at the time Iqbal was writing the *Jāwīd Nāma* this process of transformation was ongoing. Iqbal expresses his unease about nationalism elsewhere:

I have been repudiating the concept of Nationalism since the time when it was not well-known in India and the Muslim world. At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of European authors that the imperialistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon—the propagation of the European conception of Nationalism in Muslim countries—to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces ...[This]has now reached its climax in as much as some of the religious leaders in India lend their support to this conception.⁴⁸

The way both poems imply each other through their opposition, then, articulates the tension within Indian Muslim separatism itself, which stemmed from the securing of a nationality within India on the basis of an ideology which saw itself as the antithesis of the idea of nationalism. This mutual implication through opposition is articulated through the geographical spaces of both poems; the carefully delineated territory of India as a geographical image is secured through the opposing geographical image of pan-Islam. The interdependence through opposition also raises another point. The second poem, as a pan-Islamic and potentially separatist text, can only make sense if the reader recalls the first, Indian nationalist, poem. It is oriented towards the first piece, spatially as geographical image, textually as writing back against it, and relationally in terms of identity. Its title and form identify it with the first poem while at the same time repudiating it. Taken together, the geographical imagination in these poems enacts a simultaneous identification and rejection that lies at the heart of nationalist separatism.

⁴⁴ Jamal al-Din Afghani (1839–97) is generally viewed as the nineteenth century's chief ideologue of pan-Islam.

⁴⁵ Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, 217–18.

⁴⁶ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992), 19–23; M. E. Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War* (London: Longman, 1991), 2–5.

⁴⁷ Yapp, *The Near East*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, ed. A. R. Tariq, (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1973), 230.

GEOGRAPHIES OF SUBJECTIVITY

Travel as an inner journey

“Tarāna-e Millī” ends with Iqbal likening his poem to a caravan’s bell, announcing the start of the day’s journey. This opens the poem outwards, while “Tarāna-e Hindī” ends inwards, with the poet withholding the secrets that make him uniquely isolated. What also holds the poems together in their mutual opposition, then, is the poet’s own internally diverse persona.⁴⁹ The space of both poems refers to the projection of different parts of himself, the one inside India, the other outside. Both poems, then, articulate not just historical geographies, but also a geography of subjectivity—that is, the arrangement of an interior space of selfhood in relation to different parts of the external world. In this regard, as a text representing a journey, Iqbal’s *Jāvīd Nāma* stands in a complex relationship with Urdu and Persian travelogues by Indians in the nineteenth century. Many of these travelogues contain accounts of social, political and economic institutions, particularly those of Britain. Mirza Abu Taleb Khan’s is the most detailed in this respect.⁵⁰ Karim Khan, who left for London from Calcutta in March 1840, also provides an account of the British parliament and the British political system.⁵¹ As Schimmel has stressed, Iqbal’s *Jāvīd Nāma* addresses political and social issues.⁵² But for Iqbal, engaging with social and political issues in the external realm goes hand in hand with the progressive inwardness of a subjective interiority, itself fashioned as a form of travel.

Muslim travellers have used specific and complex concepts of travel as ways to understand their own journeys. Piscatori and Eickelman have outlined four categories of journey in an Islamic lexicon of travel. These include *hajj* (pilgrimage), *hijra* (emigration), *rihla* (travel for learning), and *zīyāret* (visits to shrines). While these may involve spiritual or temporal movement, they are rooted in physical travel.⁵³ Iqbal’s *Jāvīd Nāma* incorporates some elements of these categories of travel. The desire for learning partly propels his travels. However, the poem is ultimately the account of an inner journey and not a

⁴⁹ I discuss this more in my *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*, but see also J. Majeed, “Putting God in His Place: Bradley, McTaggart, and Iqbal”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4 (1993), 208–36.

⁵⁰ Mirza Abu Taleb, *Masīri tālibī yā safar nāma-ye Mīrzā Abū Tālib Khān*, 250 ff., 357–69, 404, 430–32, 492–6. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, c. 1982), 215–16.

⁵¹ Nawab Karim Khan, *Siyahat Nama*, ed. Ibadat Barelvi (Lahore: Majlis-e Isha’at Makhtūsat Idarah-ye va tanqīd, 1982), 121–2, 198, 274–6, 278–83.

⁵² Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987), 175.

⁵³ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, “Preface”, in *idem*, eds., *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1990), xii.

physical one; its cosmic landscape of the heavenly spheres represents stages of an imaginative rather than a physical ascent. Moreover, the *Jāvīd Nāma* represents a distinctive break from previous traditions of travel by utilizing as its framework the *mi'rāj*, or the narrative of the prophet Muhammad's ascension through the Heavens, as referred to in the Quran at 81:19–25, and 53:1–21.⁵⁴ There have been and continue to be many interpretations of these verses.⁵⁵ Iqbal's sense of the evolving nature of Islam is reflected, therefore, in the choice of this already contested framework as well as his reworking of it. But in choosing the narrative framework of the *mi'rāj* for his journey, as opposed to other categories of travel, Iqbal reinforces his sense of the inwardness of travel and its grounding of selfhood. While Piscatori and Eickelman have stressed how "travel of several kinds is . . . significant for Muslim self-expression", for Iqbal the self that is being articulated is constructed through a highly specific form of travel, rather than being expressed through it alone.

Moreover, that selfhood is itself a form of inner travel and mobility. The fifth question in another of Iqbal's poems, "Gulshan-e Rāz-e Jadīd" ("The New Rose Garden", 1927) poses the question of selfhood: "What am I ? Tell me what "I" [*man*] means./What is the meaning of 'travel into yourself' [*andar khud safar kun*]?" In part, the response includes an exhortation to undertake a journey into one's self (*safar dar khud kun*) in order to see what "I" is.⁵⁶ The poet stresses the centrality of travel for the possession of a self when he warns the questioner not to seek the end of the journey, because there is no end point to this journey. For him, there is only a ceaseless journey.⁵⁷

This sense of a mobile self on an internal journey of introspection is underlined in other ways in the *Jāvīd Nāma*. The poet uses the name *zinda rūd* or "living stream". Others describe him as a river in full flow, as when Tipu Sultan compares him to the River Cauvery.⁵⁸ These attributes are stressed by the poet himself when he refers to the River Cauvery as "unceasingly on its journey [*safar*]" in whose life (*jān*) he sees a new commotion (*shor*).⁵⁹ Such images and comparisons reinforce the sense of the poet as on an ongoing journey, enacting a travelling selfhood as he unfolds his poem. Iqbal also uses the image of the self as a boat travelling across stormy and dangerous seas to underpin his sense of the dangers of the

⁵⁴ For a direct reference to the *mi'rāj* in the *JN* see *JN*, 20/1–3.

⁵⁵ "Mi'rādj", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edn, Vol. 7 (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1993; hereafter *EI* 2), 97–105; Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, chap. 9.

⁵⁶ "Gulshan-e Rāz-e Jadīd", in *Kullīyāt-e fārsī*, 160/1, 161/9. This poem begins on page 535.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 166/5 and 7.

⁵⁸ *JN*, 182/9; Arberry, 132/3363–4.

⁵⁹ *JN*, 181/9; Arberry, 131/3345–6. In Iqbal's poetic lexicon, the term "commotion" or "uproar" signifies, amongst other things, the work of the creative imagination.

internal journey he is making.⁶⁰ In the final section of the poem, when face to face with the Presence of Divinity, he speaks of his ecstatic experience in terms of hazarding the skiff of the soul (*zauraq-e jān*) on a sea of light (*baḥr-e nūr*).⁶¹

Travel, archives and interiority

There are other ways in which Iqbal's travelling texts represent a distinctive development of preceding Urdu and Persian travelogues from South Asia. A number of these travelogues refer to the archives and libraries their authors visit in Europe, primarily in Britain and France. Their descriptions are redolent of the increasing power of Europe in its age of imperial expansion, or, more precisely, of the "textuality of empire", as Elleke Boehmer has called it.⁶² Mirza Abu Taleb Khan pays particular attention to libraries, noting both the extent of the collections in the Trinity College Library in Dublin, the King's Library in London, and the Bodleian Library in Oxford.⁶³ Later travelogues written in English also convey a sense of the authors' awe at the size of archives in Britain.⁶⁴

There are two specific ways in which travel, power and archives are imbricated in these travelogues. First, in the case of the King's Library, Mirza Abu Taleb singles out a copy of the *Shāhjahān Nāma*, and describes how it came to be in England. The transfer of the memoirs of a Mughal emperor, on the decline of that empire's capital, into the monarch's library in London, resonates with the supplanting of one empire by another, and the shift of power from Delhi to London.⁶⁵ In his epic poem on the "Flow and Ebb of Islam", Hali articulated how the travelling of texts from one continent to another parallels shifts in political and cultural power.⁶⁶ The *Musaddas* is acutely aware of what political and imperial power can command in archival terms.

Travel, power and archives are imbricated in a second way in these texts. Yusuf Khan describes the King's Library (*kitābkhāna shāh*) in London, referring to its global collection of books in Arabic, Persian, Greek, Syriac and English, as

⁶⁰ For one example see *JN*, 89/1–5; Arberry, 73/1597–1606.

⁶¹ *JN*, 189/5; Arberry, 136/3506.

⁶² Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50. See also Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York and Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9. For the centrality of archives to the British imperial imagination see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), Introduction.

⁶³ Mirza Abu Taleb, 133, 216.

⁶⁴ T. B. Pandian, *England to an Indian Eye: Or English Pictures from an Indian Camera* (London: Elliot Stock, 1897), 61.

⁶⁵ Mirza Abu Taleb, pp. 313–14. See Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 150, for details of the movements of other archives.

⁶⁶ Hali, *Musaddas*, verses 88–9, on pages 134–5.

of such a size that from afar it appeared to be like a mountain (*pahār*). On a second visit he refers again to its collection (*dher*) of books on every branch of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and in every language (*zabān*).⁶⁷ Here, though, he puns on the verb *seir karna*, which means both to travel and to read, when he says that if one were to read/travel through this collection day and night, one would not reach its extremities (*nihāyet*).⁶⁸

The *Jāvid Nāma* emerges from this conflation of travel and reading. But Iqbal is concerned less with reading texts and more with questioning the authors of those texts themselves. He personifies and personalizes texts by representing them in terms of their authors with whom he can either have a dialogue in a face-to-face encounter, or whose views he represents and mobilizes on his own ascent through the spheres. To give just one example, the poet presents himself as a participant in the encounter and dialogue between Tolstoy and a woman who identifies herself in response to the poet's questions as *Ifrangīn* ("the European").⁶⁹ The high regard Iqbal has for Nietzsche is clear in the poet's placing him beyond the spheres, which is presented as Nietzsche's station (*maqām*). The poet's guide, the great Persian poet Rumi,⁷⁰ identifies Nietzsche,⁷¹ and proceeds to outline his significance and importance in terms of the visionary ascent in the poem. Alongside these European writers and thinkers, the poet also has extended dialogues with the Urdu poet Ghalib,⁷² and the mystic al-Hallaj.⁷³

⁶⁷ Yusuf Khan, *Safar Yusuf Khan Kammal posh kā mulk inglistān mein* (Delhi: Pandit Dharam Nayāyan, 1847), 110.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁹ *JN*, 51–3.

⁷⁰ Jalal ud-din Rumi, 1207–73, is generally considered to be the greatest mystic poet in the Persian language. He is famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic, the *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi* or "Spiritual Couplets". This consists of some 26,000 couplets and is a compendium of different aspects of Sufi thought in the thirteenth century. The work is difficult to systematize, and perhaps part of the point of the work is to resist such systematization.

⁷¹ *JN*, 151–3. For an important discussion of Iqbal's treatment of Nietzsche, and for the latter's influence on Iqbal, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 93, 101, 104, 118–19, 213, 266, 270, 282, 323–7. For Iqbal's perception of parallels between Nietzsche and Sufism in general see Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989; first published 1934), 154–5.

⁷² Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869) was a major Indian poet who wrote in Urdu and Persian.

⁷³ *JN*, 115–34, Arberry, 90–105. For an extended discussion of al-Hallaj's philosophy see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 62–77. Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, c. 858–c. 922, was a controversial Sufi figure whose death in Baghdad is an important reference point in the history of Sufism. He was arrested and imprisoned for apparently uttering the words *Ana al-haqq* ("I am the Truth/God"). He was accused of claiming to be divine, and was executed in 922.

In Persian and Urdu travelogues of the nineteenth century the archives and libraries of Europe are testimonies to imperial power. In Iqbal's work, however, the archive is transformed by the poet's creative imagination into authors with whom he engages. In doing so, Iqbal calls attention to his own creative powers of reading. In keeping with the internal geography of subjectivity in the poem, this style of reading exemplifies one of the strategies of a "self-concentrated" individual⁷⁴ who in part fashions his or her own interiority through the selective appropriation of texts. In Iqbal's imaginary geography, the "West" is a place in an empirical geography, a strategic location for articulating subjectivity, a reading space for the appropriation of selected texts in the project of selfhood, and an interlocutor in a cross-cultural dialogue. It becomes a textual and archival territory in which reading, thinking and travelling are conflated.

The problem of return

Iqbal's *Jāvid Nāma*, and his work in general, then, represents a distinctive development of preceding travelogues in terms of its explicit articulation of a geography of subjectivity, expressed through images of travel. I have argued above that there is a defining tension within Iqbal's political geographies, which centres on the mutual implication through opposition between pan-Islam and nationalism in general, and Indian nationalism in particular. There is also a tension between the definition of selfhood in his work and political geography in general. This tension is played out in the *Jāvid Nāma*. When the poet abstracts himself from the world in order to find himself on a journey through the spheres, the question arises of how he is to return to the world with his newly elaborated self. Iqbal is clearly aware of this problem of return. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he commented that the significance of this experience is not just that the Prophet stood before God with perfect self-possession, but that he returned unscathed from that experience to this world. It is in this context that Iqbal cites the words of 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi that "Muhammad of Arabia ascended the highest Heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should never have returned".⁷⁵

The problem of return surfaces as a tension between the metaphysics of being and the realm of politics in Iqbal's work. In 1932, the year the *Jāvid Nāma* was published, he delivered his presidential address to the All-India Muslim Conference. In this he followed up the argument he made in his 1930 presidential address to the same conference for a possible single state within India for Muslims. The 1932 speech is framed by the difficulties of reconciling metaphysics with politics. Iqbal describes how the process of abstraction, which involves

⁷⁴ The phrase is Iqbal's; see *Reconstruction*, 120.

⁷⁵ *Reconstruction*, 99.

reflecting upon concepts and defining ideals, necessarily requires a “clean jump over temporal limitations”. Describing himself as “a visionary idealist”, he outlines how such a thinker “has constantly to take stock of, and often yield to, the force of those very limitations which he has been in the habit of ignoring”. The result is the experience of living in “perpetual mental conflict” and “self-contradiction”.⁷⁶ Elsewhere I have explored in more detail the philosophical and theological implications of these contradictions in Iqbal’s work.⁷⁷ The point here, however, is that the problems of reconciling the two realms of politics and metaphysics are illustrated by putting his 1932 presidential address alongside the *Jāvid Nāma*. In the *Jāvid Nāma* the category of nation is associated with the body and the material world of dimensions, which, as we have seen, the poem works towards dissolving so that the poet can achieve his status as a master poet. This is made clear when one of the ancient gods of the Arabian peninsula celebrates how “Free man [*mard-e hur*] has fallen into the bonds of directions [*band-e jahāt*]/joined up with fatherland [*watan*] and parted from God”.⁷⁸ The poem clearly places the territorial concept of the nation in the realm of the body that the poet is struggling to transcend: “A nation’s [*millat*] spirit exists through association/a nation’s spirit has no need of a body [*badan*]”.⁷⁹ The conflict between the world of the poem and the category of national territory is expressed in Afghani’s speech, when he asserts that “God’s remembrance [*zīkr-e haq*] requires not nations [*ummatān*]/it transcends the bounds of space [*makān*] and time [*zamān*]”.⁸⁰ The cosmic landscape of the poem makes explicit this journeying away from the territorial character of the earth divided up into empires and nations. Furthermore, the category of the nation is also seen to be a Western category, used to divide non-European peoples in general, but the Muslim *ummah* (roughly speaking, a global Muslim community) in particular.⁸¹ This incompatibility between Iqbal’s category of Islam and “the growth of territorial nationalism, with its emphasis on what is called national characteristics”, is also pointed to in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*.⁸²

This sense of two realms difficult to reconcile is made explicit in the use of the terms “East” and “West” in the *Jāvid Nāma*. In keeping with the multiple levels of meaning in the text, the poet uses these terms literally in the sense of the direction of sunrise and sunset, so that they signify the world of dimensions and the diurnal round of time. He also uses them as discursive terms signifying

⁷⁶ Speeches and Statements of Iqbal, 33–4.

⁷⁷ See Majeed, “Putting God in His Place”.

⁷⁸ *JN*, 91/8; Arberry, 75/1654–5.

⁷⁹ *JN*, 193/3; Arberry, 139/3601–2.

⁸⁰ *JN*, 82/1; Arberry, 69/1499–1500.

⁸¹ *JN*, 62/5–6; Arberry, 55/1033–36.

⁸² *Reconstruction*, 112, 123.

opposing civilizations and cultures that reflect different ways of being in the world. In one passage he uses this play of meaning to illustrate the problematic nature of the relationship between a nation and its people, while at the same time framing this within the metaphysical problem of relations and the absolute as a point which is beyond all relations:⁸³

Though it is out of the East [*mashriq*] that the sun rises
showing itself bold and bright, without a veil [*be-ḥijāb*]
only then it burns and blazes with inward fire [*sauz-e darūn*]
when it escapes from the shackles [*qaid*] of East and West
its nature [*fītrat*] is innocent of both east and west
though relationship-wise [*nisbat*], true, it is an easterner [*khāvarī*].⁸⁴

In the context of the metaphysics of being that the poem investigates through its carefully controlled aesthetic, the nation appears as an impediment to self-realization and to knowing the true nature of things. This is why the *Jāvīd Nāma* ends with this exhortation to the poet: “Abandon the East, be not spellbound by the West [*afsūnī-ye ifrang*]/for all this ancient and new is not worth one barleycorn”.⁸⁵ The poet goes beyond the oppositional categories of East and West as he reaches his final station. The culminating act of self-fashioning in the *Jāvīd Nāma* is irreconcilable with the demands of becoming national. All that remains for him is a moment of intoxicating beauty in the *Jāvīd Nāma*, in which he achieves the apotheosis of his selfhood, when he beholds the earth and the heaven “drowned [*gharq*] in the light [*nūr*] of dawn” and “crimson [*surkh*] like a jujube-tree”.⁸⁶ Significantly, it is this vision that concludes his *magum opus*, rather than any narrative of return to the earth.

CONCLUSION

This essay has examined the geographical imagination of Indian Muslim separatism in the Urdu and Persian poetry of Muhammad Iqbal in the early twentieth century. It has argued that the historical geography in his work is composite and that there are tensions between its different elements. One tension stems specifically from the nature of Muslim nationalist separatism in India. But the other tension, between a geography of subjectivity and the homogenizing, levelling demands of nationalism, is not specific to this separatism. It is a characteristic of all narratives centred on individual selfhood, which, for that

⁸³ For a detailed argument regarding this aspect of metaphysics in Iqbal see my “Putting God in His Place”.

⁸⁴ *JN*, 63/11–12, 14; Arbërry, 56/1061–4, 1067–8.

⁸⁵ *JN*, 195/6; Arbërry, 140/3635–6.

⁸⁶ *JN*, 195/1–2; Arbërry, 140/3625–9.

very reason, cannot be integrated into the imperatives of levelling nationalisms.⁸⁷ By paying attention to the way in which these tensions are expressed in geographical images and concepts, we can begin to unravel the relationships between the space of interiority which defines individual selfhood, and the space of the external realm of nationalist politics which can repress, as much as liberate, the articulation of individual selfhood.

⁸⁷ See my *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*.

AFTERWORD

C. A. BAYLY

This issue has been concerned with two problems. First, all the contributors have considered how ideas travelled to, from and within nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. It examines how these ideas were received and reinterpreted by India's English-influenced intelligentsia in the light of its own intellectual histories. Second, the volume is intended as a contribution to an emerging global and transnational history of ideas that attempts to set the sophisticated traditions of European, Atlantic, Islamic and Asian intellectual history in a world context.

Intellectual historians have long been concerned with the question of how ideas formulated in one society are appropriated, domesticated and even rejected in others. Histories of the Muslim world, notably Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*,¹ showed how representative government, which was a relatively new concept over much of nineteenth-century Europe itself, was received and adjusted to existing ideologies in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Some authorities found an analogy to popular representation in the ancient Islamic concept of *shura* or consultation. Others claimed that modern institutions and knowledge represented a resurfacing of divine revelation and reason (*ilm*) that had been vouchsafed to humanity by the tradition of Prophecy (cf. Devji, above, for South Asia).

Another classic illustration of how ideas travel is to be found in J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment*.² In this case, ideas of civic republicanism, deriving from Aristotle and formalized by Machiavelli and the Venetians, were domesticated in England and later the American colonies, apparently far from their intellectual home. New ideas were appropriated because conceptual space had already been made for them. In England the hierarchy of church and royalty had been disrupted by the Puritan ideology that man stands before his maker unmediated. This understanding of the individual was complemented by the

¹ A. H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

² J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

theme that England as a reformed polity took part, on its own responsibility, in the sacred drama of unfolding Christian virtue. To that was added, in time, the historic idea of the ancient constitution, which guaranteed “good counsel” to a legitimate, but by no means sacred, monarchy. The British—and in turn the Americans—found analogies for ancient Athens and renaissance Venice in their own traditions. Thus the idea of civic humanism bonded with existing forms of Christian spirituality to create new ideological patterns.

This issue has traced similar appropriations and adaptations in India in the context of the ancient and complex forms of knowledge and sacred ideology which had grown up in the subcontinent. India had its own liberal “moment” remarkably early in the nineteenth century when European ideas—a medley of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Locke, Hume, Kant and, later, Hegel—were received and transformed there. In this case again, a variety of existing religious ideologies, such as Islamic and Zoroastrian free-thinking, the this-worldly ethical tradition of Vedanta Sastra and the empowering spiritual technique of Tantra, acted as bodies of thought with a similar role to that ascribed by Pocock to Puritanism. They provided intellectual redoubts, standing against Brahminical ritualism, in which civic republicanism and later European idealist thought could be received and transformed. Further, in India, the shock and humiliation of colonial conquest and suborning of indigenous monarchies greatly exceeded even the moral apocalypse of the English Civil War. In this context, Rammohan Roy and his descendants in Madras and Bombay developed their own Indian version of the “ancient constitution” to empower a new Indian public sphere in which to oppose the racial despotism of the East India Company.

This short period marked a crucial rupture in the history of ideas. In the longer term, “Western” ideas of liberty, sociability and humanity were transformed and even deepened in the Indian context, while at the same time ideas previously regarded as “Indian” were projected onto a world-historical stage and found resonances and disciples in the West. The careers of Swami Vivekanand, Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were testimony to this outward journey.

All the contributors to this issue, then, address the question of the domestication, rejection or circumvention of exogenous ideas in the context of endogenous ones and the use of these ideas as arguments at a world level. A critical concept here is analogy: ancient Greek lawgivers were conceived as analogous to India’s Manu and Sankara. The historic European contest and accommodation between church and empire, with all its profound ideological consequences, became analogous in the minds of nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals to the supposed ancient contention between Brahmin and Rajput (Bayly, above). Western idealism found an analogy in Indian vedantism with its

emphasis on the development of spirit through history. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, professor and radical nationalist leader, found in his study of the *Bhagavad Gita* analogies with the thought of Herbert Spencer, though a further injection of this-worldly religion into social Darwinism was necessary to make good the parallel (Kapila, above).

Analogy was, above all, a way in which people tried to understand the world of rapid change and movement in which they were living. This passion for understanding was the product of conjuncture, the simultaneous explosion of global crisis—intellectual, economic, political and moral. It was a period when despotisms—the restored European monarchies, the tsars, the papacy, the sultanate, the despotic Company and later crown governments in India— all seemed to be under attack from worldwide movements of constitutional liberalism, democratic nationalism and international humanism. It was also a period when the state in India was forced by its own ignorance to create new rules and codes to try to discipline the flux beneath it (Wilson, above). This historical conjuncture, for instance, made the Permanent Settlement of the revenues of Bengal in 1793 seem, for a time, like the post-revolutionary settlement in France, or seemed to make Hegel an *avatar* of modern Bengal, where the people, their land and their labour needed to be understood as a single entity since they were all part of one being moving in world history (Sartori, above).

Some situations, however, defied analogy and some political ideas could not easily be transplanted or domesticated in Indian soil, or were choked by the ideological growths surrounding them. Soulless Benthamism, mechanical “Smithianism” and the materialist version of Darwinism were all rejected by Indian intellectuals, or else they were appropriated and reconstructed in such a way that they bore little relation to the originary texts and interpretations. John Stuart Mill was intellectually dismembered, his emphasis on liberty and education retained, but his disparaging views of civilizations outside the modern West were silently discarded. The translations and interpretations of Western oriental scholars were appropriated and fed into India’s reconstructed past when, like Friedrich Max Müller, they put ancient India on a pedestal, but were rejected wholesale when they did not accord with that vision (Dodson, above). Western intellectuals and public moralists were used strategically as weapons to fight even more opprobrious ideological enemies. Thus John Stuart Mill was used by Ashutosh Mukherjee to damn James FitzJames Stephen’s moralized new imperialism.³ German and French authorities were consistently employed to disparage British paternalists writing about India. Sometimes European writers were cited merely as successors and pale

³ Ashutosh Mookerjee (*sic*), “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity by James FitzJames Stephen” (London, 1873), *Mookerjee’s Magazine*, 2 (1873), 372–92.

imitators of the great tradition of Sanskrit sages that stretched from Manu to Sankara and so on into the middle ages of Indian history. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Muslim modernist writers (Devji, above) adopted yet another tactic by creating a genealogy for Islamic modernist thought that related it back to the great age of Greek rationality and Semitic prophecy which culminated in Muhammad's revelation. Here, despite the appearance of "dialogue" between East and West, Western modernity was simply "provincialized", to use the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty.⁴ But it was provincialized by reason and history, rather than by any appeal to a vague popular authenticity. Thus analogy, incorporation, translation, circumvention and rejection were all modes of appropriation used by Indian public men at different times in the overall attempt to understand the alarming new world in which they lived.

In addition to considering how ideas were generated in India and appropriated from outside, this issue has the wider aim of contributing to the project of a global or transnational history of ideas for the modern period. This is not, of course, to argue that India did not generate, transmit and receive ideas from the wider world before the late eighteenth century. On the contrary, India's traffic in ideas with the Buddhist, Islamic and even Christian ecumenes had produced vibrant traditions of debate and textual analysis stretching back many centuries. These debates ran parallel to and sometimes intersected with India's own long-standing traditions of Sanskrit learning. For instance, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, domesticated in the Islamic world, found their way to India, where they were in turn modified by Indian concepts of right political conduct.⁵ However, the eighteenth-century transition from the old world empires—the Ottomans, Mughals, Safavids and Qing—to the new European and American national empires created a profound set of ideological changes. Of course, many Indian social and economic forms persisted over this divide. But they were viewed from very different ideological perspectives by the new men of the nineteenth century. This reflected, in part, a massive geographical expansion of the range of ideological appropriations made by Indian thinkers. Rammohan pondered the Italian Carbonari, the Irish Liberator and Simon Bolivar; he read and later met Jeremy Bentham. The Bengal democrats and humanists of the late nineteenth century felt they were intimate with Mazzini, Hegel and Comte. A satirical editorial in an Indian journal chided the young Bengali intelligentsia for being poised "between Kali and Kant", debating German philosophy before dutifully attending sacrifice to the goddess of destruction and renewal. Pan-Islamists had begun by the

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵ See e.g. Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

twentieth century to trace the fates of their co-religionists in places as far distant as Algeria, the Caucasus and Tripoli, while even up to the 1880s Islamic thought was, by and large, centred on its Indian homeland, particularly the Gangetic basin of north India (Jalal, above).

Yet the use here of the terms global or transnational intellectual history does not simply refer to this massive widening of scale, it also seeks to convey the idea that the actual content of political, religious and ideological thought in India had become irrevocably global or transnational by the early decades of the nineteenth century. There were two external conditions that determined this change: first, the expansion of print culture and its effect on the dissemination of ideas and, second, the trauma of colonial conquest. India had always been a “literacy-aware” society and information and ideas had travelled along complex routes serviced by newsletters, runners, petition writers and information specialists of various sorts. The sudden spread of the lithographic press, and the rise of newspaper and book publishing, redoubled the dynamism of information dissemination in the subcontinent. British libraries and reading circles in the major port cities were rapidly penetrated and imitated by the Indian intelligentsia. Irony, satire and surprisingly violent political comment had become the order of the day in Indian public circles by the 1830s. It is from newspapers and ephemera rather than merely from the canonical texts of leisured thinkers that we can reconstruct an Indian intellectual history. Consequently liberty of communication was not simply a political demand; it became, like liberty of trade, a political doctrine.

As already implied, India’s loss of political autonomy to an aggressive, expansionist European power inflicted an intellectual revolution on Indians as dramatic and devastating as the political destruction of its kingdoms and rulers. This was a wholly different political context from the one that confronted the English when they began to appropriate the ideas of Machiavelli. It was the English Civil War redoubled by foreign conquest. It was as if the Aztecs had somehow regrouped and occupied England. The foundations of South Asian thought had been destroyed and had to be rethought *de novo*. Political legitimacy, the ends of communal living, the nature of sovereignty and ultimately the meaning of the Indian self had to be wholly revised. If British nineteenth-century debates between Liberals and Tories about the proper extent of liberty were fierce, how much deeper were they in India, where all the participants thought of themselves as slaves. This was why the theme of slavery surfaced again and again in their understanding of the world from Rammohan’s denunciation of the Company as a slave-trader, through Aurobindo’s denunciation of India’s enslavement and yearning for an ethical polity (Bose, above), to Nehru’s speeches on the eve of independence. Liberty was an ineffable essence, rather than simply a condition of civil society, in a situation where a whole civilization felt deprived of it.

As a result of this, Indian thought became globalized or transnationalized in a sense deeper than the purely geographical (Majeed, above). The history and contemporary politics of the world became a moral drama in which India had to compete. Were Indians to disappear under the impact of colonization like American Indians and Australian Aborigines, as some writers feared in the 1830s?⁶ Was the Hindu “race” degenerating, by comparison with not just Europeans and Americans, but even Muslims, as some of their descendants feared in the 1900s?⁷ Here Indians, like Europeans a little before them, turned to an ever more elaborate understanding of history for the answer. Increasingly, Indian public moralists “historicized” political thought, religion, the status of women and relations between religious communities or castes. History explained not only the demise of Indian liberty and self-respect, but also pointed to the grounds of their recapitulation. If Indians had once been capable of creating the most ancient and sophisticated civilization on earth, then it was fortune, circumstance and poor judgement, rather than the weak mental and moral capacity ascribed to them by a James Mill or a FitzJames Stephen, that explained their present predicament.

By the 1920s and the end of the period discussed in these articles, other doctrines were being created or domesticated in South Asia. Gandhi, despite his reputation as a traditionalist, was propagating a radical and morally empowered version of the self that severed it from the historicist pathway (Kapila, above). Scientific Marxism provided a new, materialist version of the evolutionary schema, even though Indians thinkers tried constantly to “inject” it with immanent spirit, as they had earlier done with Darwin. These new doctrines, however, were received and transformed in the context of the new ideas about history, religion and civil society that had emerged in the subcontinent since about 1800. In this way, India, rather than being an exceptional culture, cast athwart the thrust of Western society and its ideologies, as was argued by orientalists through to Louis Dumont in the 1960s, was instead a critical example of a global process. “Religion” in nineteenth-century India was not an aspect of surviving hierarchical tradition, but yet another hybrid version of the spirit underlying ethical polity, as debated by thinkers from Aristotle through Machiavelli to Jefferson. The modern intellectual history of India, even more than that of China or Japan, complicates and subverts the distinction between the Western and the Oriental. Modern Indian intellectual history attests to the virtuosity of Indian thinking about modernity. While its thinkers were all afflicted by a melancholy born of their subject status, they displayed an extraordinary receptiveness to outside forms combined with a capacity to authorize their own distinctive contributions to a global debate. The decolonization of the mind long pre-dated political decolonization and also transcended it in its concern with the rearmament of the self and humanity as a whole.

⁶ “On the Colonisation of India”, *India Gazette*, 12 February 1830.

⁷ Lieutenant Colonel U. N. Mukherjee, MD, “A dying race”, *Bengalee*, 1 June 1909.

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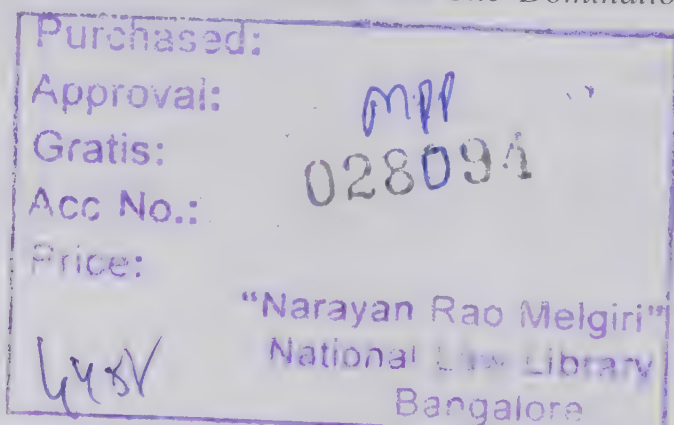
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